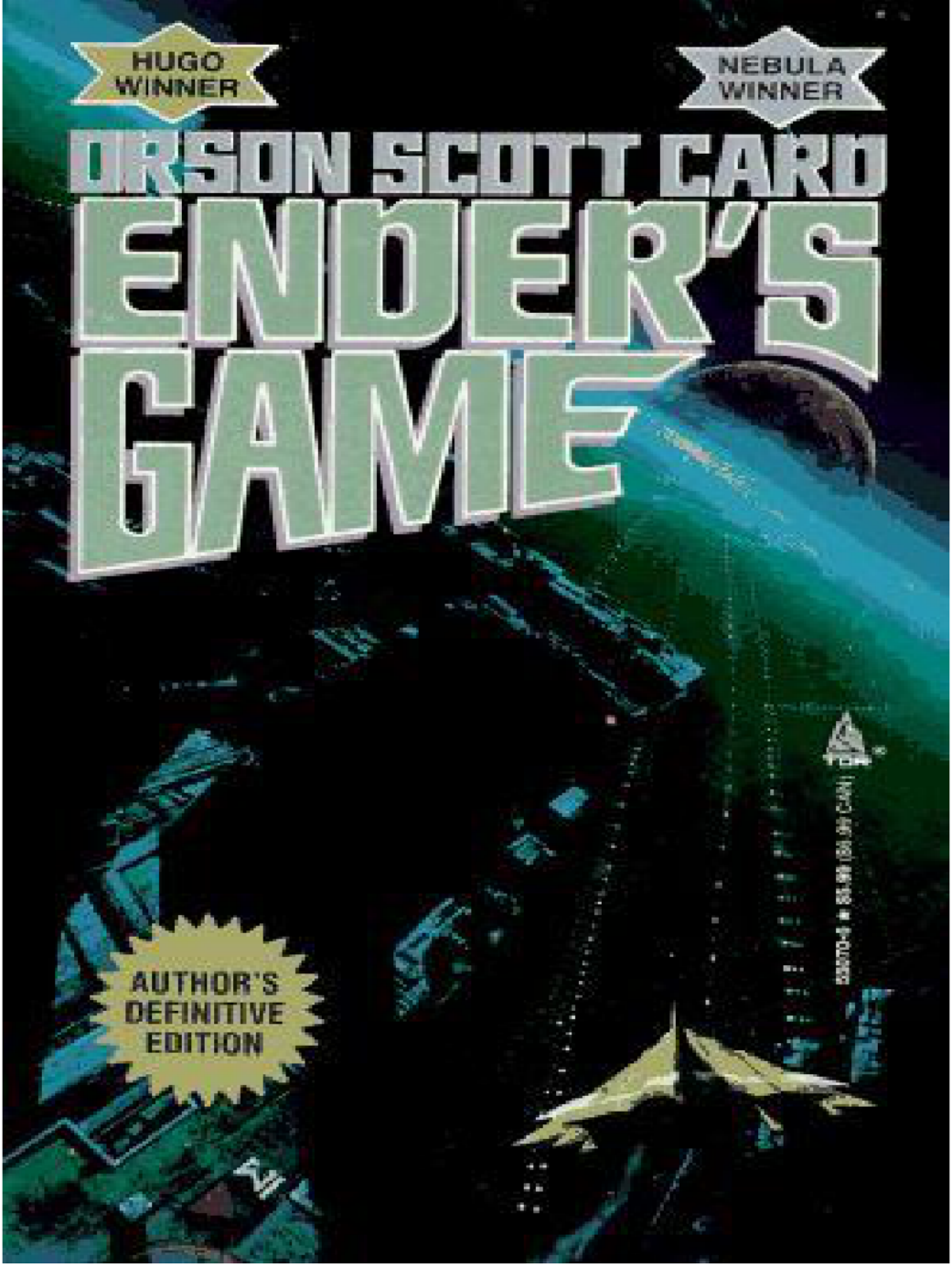
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ORSON SCOTT CARD

ENDER'S GAME

THE CLASSIC NOVEL OF ONE BOY'S DESTINY AMONG THE STARS

Ender's Game

ENDER'S GAME

For Geoffrey,
who makes me remember
how young and how old
children can be

Contents

Acknowledgments
Introduction

1. Third
2. Peter
3. Graff
4. Launch
5. Games
6. The Giant’s Drink
7. Salamander
8. Rat
9. Locke and Demosthenes
10. Dragon
11. Veni Vidi Vici
12. Bonzo
13. Valentine
14. Ender’s Teacher
15. Speaker for the Dead

Acknowledgments

Portions of this book were recounted in my first published science fiction story, “Ender's Game,” in the August 1977 Analog, edited by Ben Boya; his faith in me and this story are the foundation of my career.

Harriet McDougal of Tor is that rarest of editors--one who understands a story and can help the author make it exactly what he meant it to be. They don't pay her enough. Harriet's

task was made more than a little easier, however, because of the excellent work of my resident editor, Kristine Card. I don't pay her enough, either.

I am grateful also to Barbara Boya, who has been my friend and agent through thin and, sometimes, thick; and to Tom Doherty, my publishers who let me talk him into doing this book at the ABA in Dallas, which shows either his' superb judgment or how weary one can get at a convention.

Introduction

It makes me a little uncomfortable, writing an introduction to Ender's Game. After all, the book has been in print for six years now, and in all that time, nobody has ever written to me to say, “You know, Ender's Game was a pretty good book, but you know what it really needs? An introduction!” And yet when a novel goes back to print for a new hardcover edition, there ought to be something new in it to mark the occasion (something besides the minor changes as I fix the errors and internal contradictions and stylistic excesses that have bothered me ever since the novel first appeared). So be assured-the novel stands on its own, and if you skip this intro and go straight to the story, I not only won't stand in your way, I'll even agree with you!

The novelet “Ender's Game” was my first published science fiction. It was based on an idea--the Battle Room--that came to me when I6 was sixteen years old. I had just read Isaac Asimov's Foundation trilogy, which was (more or less) an extrapolation of the ideas in Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, applied to a galaxy-wide empire in some far future time.

The novel set me, not to dreaming, but to thinking, which is Asimov's most extraordinary ability as a fiction writer. What would the future be like? How would things change? What would remain the same? The premise of Foundation seemed to be that even though you might change the props and the actors, the play of human history is always the same. And yet that fundamentally pessimistic premise (you mean we’ll never change?) was tempered by Asimov's idea of a group of human beings who, not through genetic change, but through learned skills, are able to understand and heal the minds of other people.

It was an idea that rang true with me, perhaps in part because of my Mormon upbringing and beliefs: Human beings may be miserable specimens, in the main, but we can

learn, and, through learning, become decent people.

Those were some of the ideas that played through my mind as I read Foundation, curled on my bed--a thin mattress on a slab of plywood, a bed my father had made for me--in my basement bedroom in our little rambler on 650 East in Orem, Utah. And then, as so many science fiction readers have done over the years, I felt a strong desire to write stories that would do for others what Asimov's story had done for me.

In other genres, that desire is usually expressed by producing thinly veiled rewrites of the great work: Tolkien's disciples far too often simply rewrite Tolkien, for example. In science fiction, however, the whole point is that the ideas are fresh and startling and intriguing; you imitate the great ones, not by rewriting their stories, but. rather by creating stories that are just as startling and new.

But new in what way? Asimov was a scientist, and approached every field of human knowledge in a scientific manner--assimilating data, combining it in new and startling ways, thinking through the implications of each new idea. I was no scientist, and unlikely ever to be one, at least not a real scientist--not a physicist, not a chemist, not a biologist, not even an engineer. I had no gift for mathematics and no great love for it, either. Though I relished the study of logic and languages, and virtually inhaled histories and biographies, it never occurred to me at the time that these were just as valid sources of science fiction stories as astronomy or quantum mechanics'

How, then, could I possibly conic up with a science fiction idea? What. did I actually know about anything?

At that time my older brother Bill was in the army, stationed at Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City; he was nursing a hip-to-heel cast from a bike-riding accident, however, and came home on weekends. It was then that he had met his future wife, Laura Dene Low, while attending a church meeting on the BYU campus; and it was Laura who gave me Foundation to read. Perhaps, then, it was natural for my thoughts to turn to things military.

To me, though, the military didn't mean the Vietnam War, which was then nearing its peak of American involvement. I had no experience of that, except for Bill's stories of the miserable life in basic training, the humiliation of officer's candidate school, and his lonely but in many ways successful life as a noncom in Korea. Far more deeply rooted in my

mind was my experience, five or six years earlier, of reading Bruce Catton's three-volume Army of the Potomac. I remembered so well the stories of the commanders in that war--the struggle to find a Union general capable of using McClellan's magnificent army to defeat Lee and Jackson and Stuart, and then, finally, Grant, who brought death to far too many of his soldiers, but also made their deaths mean something, by grinding away at Lee, keeping him from dancing and maneuvering out of reach. It was because of Catton's history that I had stopped enjoying chess, and had to revise the rules of Risk in order to play it--I had come to understand something of war, and not just because of the conclusions Catton himself had reached. I found meanings of my own in that history.

I learned that history is shaped by the use of power, and that different people, leading the same army, with, therefore, approximately the same power, applied it so differently that the army seemed to change from a pack of noble fools at Fredericksburg to panicked cowards melting away at Chancellorsville, then to the grimly determined, stubborn soldiers who held the ridges at Gettysburg, and then, finally, to the disciplined, professional army that ground Lee to dust in Grant's long campaign. It wasn't the soldiers who changed. It was the leader. And even though I could not then have articulated what I understood of military leadership, I knew that I did understand it. I understood, at levels deeper than speech, how a great military leader imposes his will on his enemy, and makes his own army a willing extension of himself.

So one morning, as my Dad drove me to Brigham Young High School along Carterville Road in the heavily wooded bottoms of the Provo River, I wondered: How would you train soldiers for combat in the future? I didn't bother thinking of new land-based weapons systems--what was on my mind, after Foundation, was space. Soldiers and commanders would have to think very differently in space, because the old ideas of up and down simply wouldn't apply anymore. I had read in Nordhoffs and Hall's history of World War I flying that it was very hard at first for new pilots to learn to look above and below them rather than merely to the right and left, to find the enemy approaching them in the air. How much worse, then, would it be to learn to think with no up and down at all?

The essence of training is to allow error without

consequence. Three-dimensional warfare would need to be practiced in an enclosed space, so mistakes wouldn't send trainees flying off to Jupiter. It would need to offer a way to practice shooting without risk of injury; and yet trainees who were “hit” would need to be disabled, at least temporarily. The environment would need to be changeable, to simulate the different conditions of warfare--near a ship, in the midst of debris, near tiny asteroids. And it would need to have some of the confusion of real battle, so that the play-combat didn't evolve into something as rigid and formal as the meaningless marching and maneuvers that still waste an astonishing amount of a trainee's precious hours in basic training in our modem military.

The result of my speculations that morning was the Battle Room, exactly as you will see it (or have already seen it) in this book. It was a good idea, and something like it will certainly be used for training if ever there is a manned military in space. (Something very much like it has already been used in various amusement halls throughout America.)

But, having thought of the Battle Room, I hadn't the faintest idea of how to go about turning the idea into a story. It occurred to me then for the first time that the idea of the story is nothing compared to the importance of knowing how to find a character and a story to tell around that idea. Asimov, having had the idea of paralleling The Decline and Fall, still had no story; his genius--and the soul of the story--came when he personalized his history, making the psychohistorian Hari Seldon the god-figure, the planmaker, the apocalyptic prophet of the story. I had no such character, and no idea of how to make one.

Years passed. I graduated from high school as a junior (just in time--Brigham Young High School was discontinued with the class of 1968) and went on to Brigham Young University. I started there as an archaeology major, but quickly discovered that doing archaeology is unspeakably boring compared to reading die books by Thor Heyerdahl (Aku-Aku, Kon-Tiki), Yigael Yadin (Masada), and James Michener (The Source) that had set me dreaming. Potsherds! Better to be a dentist than to spend your life trying to put together fragments of old pottery in endless desert landscapes in the Middle East.

By the time I realized that not even the semi-science of archaeology was for someone as impatient as me, I was already immersed in my real career. At the time, of course, I

misunderstood myself: I thought I was in theatre because I loved performing. And I do love performing don't get me wrong. Give me an audience and I'll hold onto them as long as I can, on any subject. But I'm not a good actor, and theatre was not to be my career. At the time, though, all I cared about was doing plays. Directing them. Building sets. and making costumes and putting on makeup for them.

And, above all, rewriting those lousy scripts. I kept thinking, Why couldn't the playwright hear how dull that speech was? This scene could so easily be punched up and made far more effective.

Then I tried my hand at writing adaptations of novels for a reader's theatre class, and my fate was sealed. I was a playwright.

People came to my plays and clapped at the end. I learned--from actors and from audiences--how to shape a scene, how to build tension, and--above all--the necessity of being harsh with your own material, excising or rewriting anything that doesn't work. I learned to separate the story from the writing, probably the most important thing that any storyteller has to learn--that there are a thousand right ways to tell a story, and ten million wrong ones, and you're a lot more likely to find one of the latter than the former your first time through the tale.

My love of theatre lasted through my mission for the LDS Church. Even while I was in São Paulo, Brazil, as a missionary, I wrote a play called Stone Tables about the relationship between Moses and Aaron in the book of Exodus, which had standing-room-only audiences at its premiere (which I didn't attend, since I was still in Brazil!).

At the same time, though, that original impetus to write science fiction persisted.

I had taken fiction writing courses at college, for which I don't think I ever wrote science fiction. But on the side, I had started a series of stories about people with psionic powers (I had no idea this was a sci-fi cliché at the time) that eventually grew into The Worthing Saga. I had even sent one of the stories off to Analog magazine before my mission, and on my mission I wrote several long stories in the same series (as well as a couple of stabs at mainstream stories).

In all that time, the Battle Room remained an idea in the back of my mind. It wasn't until 1975, though, that I dusted it off and tried to write it. By then I had started a theatre company that managed to do reasonably well during the first

summer and then collapsed under the weight of bad luck and bad management (myself) during the fall and Winter. I was deeply in debt on the pathetic salary of an editor at BYU Press. Writing was the only thing I knew how to do besides proofreading and editing. It was time to get serious about writing something that might actually earn some money--and, plainly, playwriting wasn't going to be it.

I first rewrote and sent out “Tinker,” the first Worthing story I wrote and the one that was still most effective. I got a rejection letter from Ben Bova at Analog, pointing out that “Tinker” simply didn't feel like science fiction--it felt like fantasy. So the Worthing stories were out for the time being.

What was left? The old Battle Room idea. It happened one spring day that a friend of mine, Tammy Mikkelson, was taking her boss's children to the circus in Salt Lake City; would I like to come along? I would. And since there was no ticket for me (and I've always detested the circus anyway--the clowns drive me up a wall), I spent the hours of the performance out on the lawn of the Salt Palace with a notebook on my lap, writing “Ender's Game” as I had written all my plays, in longhand on narrow-ruled paper. “Remember,” said Ender. “The enemy's gate is down.”

Maybe it was because of the children in the car on the way up that I decided that the trainees in the Battle Room were so young. Maybe it was because I, barely an adolescent myself, understood only childhood well enough to write about it. Or maybe it was because of something that impressed me in Catton's Army of the Potomac: that the soldiers were all so young and innocent. That they shot and bayoneted the enemy, and then slipped across the neutral ground between armies to trade tobacco, jokes, liquor, and food. Even though it was a deadly game, and the suffering and fear were terrible and real, it was still a game played by children, not all that different from the wargames my brothers and I had played, firing water-filled squirt bottles at each other.

“Ender's Game” was written and sold. I knew it was a strong story because I cared about it and believed in it. I had no idea that it would have the effect it had on the science fiction audience. While most people ignored it, of course, and continue to live full and happy lives without reading it or anything else by me, there was still a surprisingly large group who responded to the story with some fervency.

Ignored on the Nebula ballot. “Ender's Game” got onto

the Hugo ballot and came in second. More to the point, I, was awarded the John W. Campbell Award for best new writer. Without doubt, “Ender's Game” wasn't just my first sale--it was the launching pad of my career.

The same story did it again in 1985, when I rewrote it at novel length--the book, now slightly revised, that you are holding in your hands. At that point I thought of Ender's Game, the novel, existing only to set up the much more powerful (I thought) story of Speaker for the Dead. But when I finished the novel, I knew that the story had new strength. I had learned a great deal, about life and about writing, in the decade since I wrote the novelet, and it came together for the first time in this book. Again the audience was kind to me: the Nebula and Hugo awards, foreign translations, and strong, steady sales that, for the first time in my career, actually earned out my advance and allowed me to receive royalties.

But it wasn't just a matter of having a quiet little cult novel that brought in a steady income. There was something more to the way that people responded to Ender's Game.

For one thing, the people that hated it really hated it. The attacks on the novel--and on me—were astonishing. Some of it I expected--I have a master’s degree in literature, and in writing Ender's Game I deliberately avoided all the little literary games and gimmicks that make “fine” writing so impenetrable to the general audience. All the layers of meaning are there to be decoded, if you like to play the game of literary criticism--but if you don't care to play that game, that's fine with me. I designed Ender's Game to be as clear and accessible as any story of mine could possibly be. My goal was that the reader wouldn't have to be trained in literature or even in science fiction to receive the tale in its simplest, purest form. And, since a great many writers and critics have based their entire careers on the premise that anything that the general public can understand without mediation is worthless drivel, it is not surprising that they found my little novel to be despicable. If everybody came to agree that stories should be told this clearly, the professors of literature would be out of a job, and the writers of obscure, encoded fiction would be, not honored, but pitied for their impenetrability.

For some people, however, the loathing for Ender's Game transcended mere artistic argument. I recall a letter to the editor of Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, in which a

woman who worked as a guidance counselor for gifted children re ported that she had only picked up Ender's Game to read it because her son had kept telling her it was a wonderful book. She read it and loathed it. Of course, I wondered what kind of guidance counselor would hold her son's tastes up to public ridicule, but the criticism that left me most flabbergasted was her assertion that my depiction of gifted children was hopelessly unrealistic. They just don't talk like that, she said. The don't think like that.

And it wasn't just her. There have been others with that criticism. Thus I began to realize that, as it is, Ender's Game disturbs some people because it challenges their assumptions about reality. In fact, the novel's very clarity may make it more challenging, simply because the story's vision of the world is so relentlessly plain. It was important to her, and to others, to believe that children don't actually think or speak the way the children in Ender's Game think and speak.

Yet I knew--I knew--that this was one of the truest things about Ender's Game. In fact, I realized in retrospect that this may indeed be part of the reason why it was so important to me, there on the lawn in front of the Salt Palace, to write a story in which gifted children are trained to fight in adult wars. Because never in my entire childhood did I feel like a child. I felt like a person all along--the same person that I am today. I never felt that I spoke childishly. I never felt that my emotions and desires were somehow less real than adult emotions and desires. And in writing Ender's Game, I forced the audience to experience the lives of these children from that perspective--the perspective in which their feelings and decisions are just as real and important as any adult's.

The nasty side of myself wanted to answer that guidance counselor by saying, The only reason you don't think gifted children talk this way is because they know better than to talk this way in front of you. But the truer answer is that Ender's Game asserts the personhood of children, and those who are used to thinking of children in another way--especially those whose whole career is based on that--are going to find Ender's Game a very unpleasant place to live.

Children are a perpetual, self-renewing underclass, helpless to escape from the decisions of adults until they become adults themselves. And Ender's Game, seen in that context, might even be a sort of revolutionary tract.

Because the book does ring true with the children who read it. The highest praise I ever received for a book of mine

was when the school librarian at Farrer Junior High in Provo, Utah, told me, “You know, Ender's Game is our most-lost book.”

And then there are the letters. This one, for instance, which I received in March of 1991:

Dear Mr. Card,

I am writing to you on behalf of myself and my twelve friends and fellow students who joined me at a two-week residential program for gifted and talented students at Purdue University this summer. We attended the class, “Philosophy and Science Fiction,” instructed by Peter Robinson, and we range in age from thirteen through fifteen.

We are all in about the same position; we are very intellectually oriented and have found few people at home who share this trait. Hence. most of us are lonely, and have been since kindergarten. When teachers continually compliment you, your chances of “fitting in” are about nil.

All our lives we've unconsciously been living by the philosophy “The only way to gain respect is doing so well you can't be ignored.” And, for me and Mike, at least. “beating the system” at school is how we've chosen to do this. Both Mike and I plan to be in calculus our second year of high school, schedules permitting. (Both of us are interested in science/math related careers.) Not to get me wrong; we're all bright and at the top of our class. However, in choosing these paths, most of us have wound up satisfied in ourselves, but very lonely.

This is why Ender's Game and Speaker for the Dead really hit home for us. These books were our “texts” for the class. We would read one hundred to two hundred pages per night and then discuss them (and other short stories and essays) during the day. At Purdue, it wasn't a “classroom” discussion, however. It was a group of friends talking about how their feelings and philosophies corresponded to .or differed from the books'.

You couldn't imagine the impact your books had on us; we are the Enders of today. Almost everything written in Ender's Game and Speaker applied to each one of us on a very, very personal level. No, the situation isn't as drastic today, but all the feelings are there. Both your books, along with the excellent work of Peter Robinson, unified us into a tight web of people.

Ingrid's letter goes on, talking of the Phoenix Rising, the magazine that these students publish together in order to maintain their sense of community. (In response I have given them this introduction to publish in their magazine before its appearance in book form.)

Of course, I'm always glad when people like a story of mine; but something much more important is gong on here. These readers found that Ender's Game was not merely a 'mythic" story, dealing with general truths, but something much more personal. To them, Ender's Game was an epic tale, a story that expressed who they are as a community, a story that distinguished them from the other people around them. They didn't love Ender, or pity Ender (a frequent adult response); they were Ender, all of them. Ender's experience was not foreign or strange to them; in their minds, Ender's life echoed their own lives. The truth of the story was not truth in general, but their truth.

Stories can be read so differently--even clear stories, even stories that deliberately avoid surface ambiguities. For instance, here's another letter, likewise one that I received in mid-March of 1991. It was written on 16 February and postmarked the 18th. Those dates are important.

Mr. Card,

I'm an army aviator waiting out a sandstorm in Saudi Arabia. I've always wanted to write you and since my future is in doubt--I know when the ground war will begin--I decided today would be the day I'd write.

I read Ender's Game during flight school four years ago. I'm a warrant officer, and our school, at least the first six weeks, is very different from the commissioned officers'. I was eighteen years old when I arrived at Ft. Rucker to start flight training, and the first six weeks almost beat me. Ender gave me courage then and many times after that. I've experienced the tiredness Ender felt, the kind that goes deep to your soul. It would be interesting to know what caused you to feel the same way. No one could describe it unless they experienced it, but I understand how personal that can be. There is one other novel that describes that frame of soul and mind that I cherish as much as Ender's Game. It's called Armour and its author is John Steakley. Ender and Felix (the protagonist of Armour) are always close by in my mind. Sadly, there is no sequel to Armour as there is to Ender's Game.

We are the bastards of military aviation. Our helicopters may be the best in the world, but the equipment we wear and the systems in our helicopter, such as the navigation instruments, are at least twenty years behind the Navy and Air Force. I am very happy with the Air Force's ability to bomb with precision, but if they miss, the bombs still land on the enemy's territory. If we screw up, the guys we haul to the battle, the “grunts,” die. We don't even have the armour plate for our chests--“chicken plate”--that the helicopter pilots did in Vietnam. Last year in El Salvador, army aviators flew a couple of civilian VIPs and twenty reporters over guerrilla-controlled territory and there were no flares in their launchers to counteract the heat-seeking missiles we know the rebels had. One of our pilots and a crew member were killed last year on a training flight because they flew the sling load they were carrying into the ~ at 70 miles an hour. It could have been prevented if our night vision goggles had a heads-up display like the Air Force has had for forty years. I'm sure you beard about Colonel Pickett being shot down in a Huey in El Salvador just a few months ago. That type of aircraft is at least thirty years. old and there are no survivability measures installed. He was a good man, I knew him.

The reason I told you about these things is because I wanted to paint a picture for you. I love my job but we aren't like the “zoomies” that everyone makes movies about. We do our job with less technology, less political support, less recognition, and more risk than the rest, while the threat to us continues to modernize at an

unbelievable rate. I'm not asking for sympathy but I was wondering if you and Mr. Steakley could write a novel about helicopters and the men that fly them for the Army twenty years in the future. There are many of us that read science fiction and after I read Ender's Game and Armour three times each I started letting my comrades read them. My wife cried when she read Ender's Game. There is a following here for a book like the one I requested. We have no speaker for us, the ones that will soon die, or the ones that survive...

As with those gifted young students who read this book as “their” story, this soldier--who, like most but not all of the Army aviators in the Gulf War survived--did not read Ender's Game as a “work of literature.” He read it as epic, as a story that helped define his community. It was not his only epic,

of course--Armour, John Steakley's fine novel, was an equal candidate to be part of his self-story. What matters most, though, was his clear sense that, no matter how much these stories spoke to him, they were still not exactly his community's epic. He still felt the need for a "speaker for the dead" and for the living. He still felt a hunger, especially at a time when death might well be near, to have his own story, his friends' stories, told.,

Why else do we read fiction, anyway? Not to be impressed by somebody's dazzling language—or at least I hope that's not our reason. I think that most of us, anyway, read these stories that we know are not "true" because we're hungry for another kind of truth: The mythic truth about human nature in general, the particular truth about those life-communities that define our own identity, and the most specific truth of all: our own self-story. Fiction, because it is not about somebody who actually lived in the real world, always has the possibility of being about ourself.

Ender's Game is a story about gifted children. It is also a story about soldiers. Captain John F. Schmitt, the author of the Marine Corp's Warfighting, the most brilliant concise book of military strategy ever written by an American (and a proponent of the kind of thinking that was at the heart of the allied victory in the Gulf War), found Ender's Game to be a useful enough story about the nature of leadership to use it in courses he taught at the Marine University at Quantico. Watauga College, the interdisciplinary studies program at Appalachian State University—as unmilitary a community as you could ever hope to find!--uses Ender's Game for completely different purposes—to talk about problem-solving and the self-creation of the individual. A graduate student in Toronto explored the political ideas in Ender's Game. A writer and critic at Pepperdine has seen Ender's Game as, in some ways, religious fiction.

All these uses are valid; all these readings of the book are "correct." For all these readers have placed themselves inside this story, not as spectators, but as participants, and so have looked at the world of Ender's Game, not with my eyes only, but also with their own.

This is the essence of the transaction between storyteller and audience. The "true" story is not the one that exists in my mind; it is certainly not the written words on the bound paper that you hold in your hands. The story in my mind is nothing but a hope; the text of the story is the tool I created

in order to try to make that hope a reality. The story itself, the true story, is the one that the audience members create in their minds, guided and shaped by my text, but then transformed, elucidated, expanded, edited, and clarified by their own experience, their own desires, their own hopes and fears.

The story of Ender's Game is not this book though it has that title emblazoned on it. The story is one that you and I will construct together in your memory. If the story means anything to you at all, then when you. remember it afterward, think of it, not as something I created, but rather as something that we made together.

Orson Scott Card
Greensboro, North Carolina
March 1991

Ender's Game

1

Third

"I've watched through his eyes, I've listened through his ears, and tell you he's the one. Or at least as close as we're going to get."

"That's what you said about the brother."

"The brother tested out impossible. For other reasons. Nothing to do with his ability."

"Same with the sister. And there are doubts about him. He's too malleable. Too willing to submerge himself in someone else's will."

"Not if the other person is his enemy."

"So what do we do? Surround him with enemies all the time?"

"If we have to."

"I thought you said you liked this kid."

"If the buggers get him, they'll make me look like his favorite uncle."

"All right. We're saving the world, after all. Take him."

The monitor lady smiled very nicely and tousled his hair and said, "Andrew, I suppose by now you're just absolutely sick of having that horrid monitor. Well, I have good news for you. That monitor is going to come out today. We're going to just take it right out, and it won't hurt a bit."

Ender nodded. It was a lie, of course, that it wouldn't hurt a bit. But since adults always said it when it was going to hurt, he could count on that statement as an accurate prediction of the future. Sometimes lies were more dependable than the truth.

"So if you'll just come over here, Andrew, just sit right up here on the examining table. The doctor will be in to see you in a moment."

The monitor gone. Ender tried to imagine the little device missing from the back of his neck. I'll roll over on my back in bed and it won't be pressing there. I won't feel it

tingling and taking up the heat when I shower.

And Peter won't hate me anymore. I'll come home and show him that the monitor's gone, and he'll see that I didn't make it, either. That I'll just be a normal kid now, like him. That won't be so bad then. He'll forgive me that I had my monitor a whole year longer than he had his. We'll be-- not friends, probably. No, Peter was too dangerous. Peter got so angry. Brothers, though. Not enemies, not friends, but brothers-- able to live in the same house. He won't hate me, he'll just leave me alone. And when he wants to play buggers and astronauts, maybe I won't have to play, maybe I can just go read a book.

But Ender knew, even as he thought it, that Peter wouldn't leave him alone. There was something in Peter's eyes, when he was in his mad mood, and whenever Ender saw that look, that glint, he knew that the one thing Peter would not do was leave him alone. I'm practicing piano, Ender. Come turn the pages for me. Oh, is the monitor boy too busy to help his brother? Is he too smart? Got to go kill some buggers, astronaut? No, no, I don't want your help. I can do it on my own, you little bastard, you little Third.

“This won't take long, Andrew,” said the doctor.

Ender nodded.

"It's designed to be removed. Without infection, without damage. But there'll be some tickling, and some people say they have a feeling of something missing. You'll keep looking around for something. Something you were looking for, but you can't find it, and you can't remember what it was. So I'll tell you. It's the monitor you're looking for, and it isn't there. In a few days that feeling will pass.”

The doctor was twisting something at the back of Ender's head. Suddenly a pain stabbed through him like a needle from his neck to his groin. Ender felt his back spasm, and his body arched violently backward; hi head struck the bed. He could feel his legs thrashing, and his hands were clenching each other, wringing each other so tightly that they ached.

“Deedee!” shouted the doctor. “I need you!” The nurse ran in, gasped. "Got to relax these muscles. Get it to me, now! What are you waiting for!”

Something changed hands; Ender could not see. He lurched to one side and fell off the examining table. “Catch him!” cried the nurse.

"Just hold him steady.”

"You hold him, doctor, he's too strong for me.”

"Not the whole thing! You'll stop his heart."

Ender felt a needle enter his back just above the neck of his shirt. It burned, but wherever in him the fire spread, his muscles gradually unclenched. Now he could cry for the fear and pain of it.

"Are you all right, Andrew?" the nurse asked.

Andrew could not remember how to speak. They lifted him onto the table. They checked his pulse, did other things; he did not understand it all.

The doctor was trembling; his voice shook as he spoke. "They leave these things in the kids for three years, what do they expect? We could have switched him off, do you realize that? We could have unplugged his brain for all time."

"When does the drug wear off?" asked the nurse.

"Keep him here for at least an hour. Watch him. If he doesn't start talking in fifteen minutes, call me. Could have unplugged him forever. I don't have the brains of a bugger."

He got back to Miss Pumphrey's class only fifteen minutes before the closing bell. He was still a little unsteady on his feet.

"Are you all right, Andrew?" asked Miss Pumphrey.

He nodded.

"Were you ill?"

He shook his head.

"You don't look well."

"I'm OK."

"You'd better sit down, Andrew."

He started toward his seat, but stopped. Now what was I looking for? I can't think what I was looking for.

"Your seat is over there," said Miss Pumphrey.

He sat down, but it was something else he needed, something he had lost. I'll find it later.

"Your monitor," whispered the girl behind him.

Andrew shrugged.

"His monitor," she whispered to the others.

Andrew reached up and felt his neck. There was a bandaid. It was gone. He was just like everybody else now.

"Washed out, Andy?" asked a boy who sat across the aisle and behind him. Couldn't think of his name. Peter. No, that was someone else.

"Quiet, Mr. Stilson," said Miss Pumphrey. Stilson

smirked.

Miss Pumphrey talked about multiplication. Ender doodled on his desk, drawing contour maps of mountainous islands and then telling his desk to display them in three dimensions from every angle. The teacher would know, of course, that he wasn't paying attention, but she wouldn't bother him. He always knew the answer, even when she thought he wasn't paying attention.

In the corner of his desk a word appeared and began marching around the perimeter of the desk. It was upside down and backward at first, but Ender knew what it said long before it reached the bottom of the desk and turned right side up.

THIRD

Ender smiled. He was the one who had figured out how to send messages and make them march-- even as his secret enemy called him names, the method of delivery praised him. It was not his fault he was a Third. It was the government's idea, they were the ones who authorized it-- how else could a Third like Ender have got into school? And now the monitor was gone. The experiment entitled Andrew Wiggin hadn't worked out after all. If they could, he was sure they would like to rescind the waivers that had allowed him to be born at all. Didn't work, so erase the experiment.

The bell rang. Everyone signed off their desks or hurriedly typed in reminders to themselves. Some were dumping lessons or data into their computers at home. A few gathered at the printers while something they wanted to show was printed out. Ender spread his hands over the child-size keyboard near the edge of the desk and wondered what it would feel like to have hands as large as a grown-up's. They must feel so big and awkward, thick stubby fingers and beefy palms. Of course, they had bigger keyboards-- but how could their thick fingers draw a fine line, the way Ender could, a thin line so precise that he could make it spiral seventy-nine times from the center to the edge of the desk without the lines ever touching or overlapping. It gave him something to do while the teacher droned on about arithmetic. Arithmetic! Valentine had taught him arithmetic when he was three.

"Are you all right, Andrew?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You'll miss the bus."

Ender nodded and got up. The other kids were gone. They would be waiting, though, the bad ones. His monitor wasn't perched on his neck, hearing what heard and seeing what he saw. They could say what they liked. They might even hit him now-- no one could see anymore, and so no one would come to Ender's rescue. There were advantages to the monitor, and he would miss them.

It was Stilson, of course. He wasn't bigger than most other kids, but he was bigger than Ender. And he had some others with him. He always did.

"Hey, Third."

Don't answer. Nothing to say.

"Hey, Third, we're talkin to you, Third, hey bugger-lover, we're talkin to you."

Can't think of anything to answer. Anything I say will make it worse. So will saying nothing.

"Hey, Third, hey, turd, you flunked out, huh? Thought you were better than us, but you lost your little birdie, Thirdie, got a bandaid on your neck."

"Are you going to let me through?" Ender asked.

"Are we going to let him through? Should we let him through?" They all laughed. "Sure we'll let you through. First we'll let your arm through, then your butt through, then maybe a piece of your knee."

The others chimed in now. "Lost your birdie, Thirdie. Lost your birdie, Thirdie."

Stilson began pushing him with one hand, someone behind him then pushed him toward Stilson.

"See-saw, marjorie daw," somebody said.

"Tennis!"

"Ping-pong!"

This would not have a happy ending. So Ender decided that he'd rather not be the unhappiest at the end. The next time Stilson's arm came out to push him, Ender grabbed at it. He missed.

"Oh, gonna fight me, huh? Gonna fight me, Thirdie?"

The people behind Ender grabbed at him, to hold him.

Ender did not feel like laughing, but he laughed. "You mean it takes this many of you to fight one Third?"

"We're people, not Thirds, turd face. You're about as strong as a fart!"

But they let go of him. And as soon as they did, Ender kicked out high and hard, catching Stilson square in the

breastbone. He dropped. It took Ender by surprise he hadn't thought to put Stilson on the ground with one kick. It didn't occur to him that Stilson didn't take a fight like this seriously, that he wasn't prepared for a truly desperate blow.

For a moment, the others backed away and Stilson lay motionless. They were all wondering if he was dead. Ender, however, was trying to figure out a way to forestall vengeance. To keep them from taking him in a pack tomorrow. I have to win this now, and for all time, or I'll fight it every day and it will get worse and worse. Ender knew the unspoken rules of manly warfare, even though he was only six. It was forbidden to strike the opponent who lay helpless on the ground; only an animal would do that.

So Ender walked to Stilson's supine body and kicked him again, viciously, in the ribs. Stilson groaned and rolled away from him. Ender walked around him and kicked him again, in the crotch. Stilson could not make a sound; he only doubled up and tears streamed out of his eyes.

Then Ender looked at the others coldly. “You might be having some idea of ganging up on me. You could probably beat me up pretty bad. But just remember what I do to people who try to hurt me. From then on you'd be wondering when I'd get you, and how bad it would be.” He kicked Stilson in the face. Blood from his nose spattered the ground nearby. “It wouldn't be this bad,” Ender said. "It would be worse.”

He turned and walked away. Nobody followed him, He turned a corner into the corridor leading to the bus stop. He could hear the boys behind him saying, “Geez. Look at him. He's wasted.” Ender leaned his head against the wall of the corridor and cried until the bus came. I am just like Peter. Take my monitor away, and I am just like Peter.

Ender's Game

2

Peter

"All right, it's off. How's he doing?"

"You live inside somebody's body for a few years, you get used to it. I look at his face now, I can't tell what's going on. I'm not used to seeing his facial expressions. I'm used to feeling them."

"Come on, we're not talking about psychoanalysis here. We're soldiers, not witch doctors. You just saw him beat the guts out of the leader of a gang."

"He was thorough. He didn't just beat him, he beat him deep. Like Mazer Rackham at the--"

"Spare me. So in the judgment of the committee, he passes.

"Mostly. Let's see what he does with his brother, now that the monitor's off."

"His brother. Aren't you afraid of what his brother will do to him?"

"You were the one who told me that this wasn't a no-risk business."

"I went back through some of the tapes. I can't help it. I like the kid. I think were going to screw him up."

"Of course we are. It's our job. We're the wicked witch. We promise gingerbread, but we eat the little bastards alive."

"I'm sorry, Ender," Valentine whispered. She was looking at the bandaid on his neck.

Ender touched the wall and the door closed behind him. "I don't care. I'm glad it's gone."

"What's gone?" Peter walked into the parlor, chewing on a mouthful of bread and peanut butter.

Ender did not see Peter as the beautiful ten-year-old boy that grown-ups saw, with dark, thick, tousled hair and a face that could have belonged to Alexander the Great. Ender looked at Peter only to detect anger or boredom, the dangerous moods that almost always led to pain. Now as

Peter's eyes discovered the bandaid on his neck, the telltale flicker of anger appeared.

Valentine saw it too. “Now he's like us,” she said, trying to soothe him before he had time to strike.

But Peter would not be soothed. "Like us? He keeps the little sucker till he's six years old. When did you lose yours? You were three. I lost mine before I was five. He almost made it, little bastard, little bugger.”

This is all right, Ender thought. Talk and talk, Peter. Talk is fine.

“Well, now your guardian angels aren't watching over you,” Peter said. "Now they aren't checking to see if you feel pain, listening to hear what I'm saying, seeing what I'm doing to you. How about that? How about it?”

Ender shrugged.

Suddenly Peter smiled and clapped his hands together in a mockery of good cheer. “Let's play buggers and astronauts,” he said.

“Where's Mom?” asked Valentine.

“Out,” said Peter. "I'm in charge.”

"I think I'll call Daddy.”

“Call away,” said Peter. "You know he's never in.”

“I'll play,” Ender said.

“You be the bugger,” said Peter.

“Let him be the astronaut for once,” Valentine said.

“Keep your fat face out of it, fart mouth,” said Peter. "Come on upstairs and choose your weapons.”

It would not be a good game, Ender knew it was not a question of winning. When kids played in the corridors, whole troops of them, the buggers never won, and sometimes the games got mean. But here in their flat, the game would start mean, and the bugger couldn't just go empty and quit the way buggers did in the real wars. The bugger was in it until the astronaut decided it was over.

Peter opened his bottom drawer and took out the bugger mask. Mother had got upset at him when Peter bought it, but Dad pointed out that the war wouldn't go away just because you hid bugger masks and wouldn't let your kids play with make-believe laser guns. The better to play the war games, and have a better chance of surviving when the buggers came again.

If I survive the games, thought Ender. He put on the mask. It closed him in like a hand pressed tight against his face. But this isn't how it feels to he a bugger, thought Ender.

They don't wear this face like a mask, it is their face. On their home worlds, do the buggers put on human masks, and play? And what do they call its? Slimies, because we're so soft and oily compared to them?

"Watch out, Slimy," Ender said.

He could barely see Peter through the eyeholes. Peter smiled at him. "Slimy, huh? Well, bugger-wugger, let's see how you break that face of yours."

Ender couldn't see it coming, except a slight shift of Peter's weight; the mask cut out his peripheral vision. Suddenly there was the pain and pressure of a blow to the side of his head; he lost balance, fell that way.

"Don't see too well, do you, bugger?" said Peter.

Ender began to take off the mask. Peter put his toe against Ender's groin. "Don't take off the mask," Peter said.

Ender pulled the mask down into place, took his hands away.

Peter pressed with his foot. Pain shot through Ender; he doubled up.

"Lie flat, bugger. We're gonna vivisect you, bugger. At long last we've got one of you alive, and we're going to see how you work."

"Peter, stop it," Ender said.

"Peter, stop it. Very good. So you buggers can guess our names. You can make yourselves sound like pathetic, cute little children so we'll love you and be nice to you. But it doesn't work. I can see you for what you really are. They meant you to be human, little Third, but you're really a bugger, and now it shows."

He lifted his foot, took a step, and then knelt on Ender, his knee pressing into Ender's belly just below the breastbone. He put more and more of his weight on Ender. It became hard to breathe.

"I could kill you like this," Peter whispered. "Just press and press until you're dead. And I could say that I didn't know it would hurt you, that we were just playing, and they'd believe me, and everything would be fine. And you'd be dead. Everything would be fine."

Ender could not speak; the breath was being forced from his lungs. Peter might mean it. Probably didn't mean it, but then he might.

"I do mean it," Peter said. "Whatever you think. I mean it. They only authorized you because I was so promising. But I didn't pan out. You did better. They think you're better. But

I don't want a better little brother, Ender. I don't want a Third."

"I'll tell," Valentine said.

"No one would believe you."

"They'd believe me."

"Then you're dead, too, sweet little sister."

"Oh, yes," said Valentine. "They'll believe that. 'I didn't know it would kill Andrew. And when he was dead, I didn't know it would kill Valentine too.'"

The pressure let up a little.

"So. Not today. But someday you two won't be together. And there'll be an accident."

"You're all talk," Valentine said. "You don't mean any of it."

"I don't?"

"And do you know why you don't mean it?" Valentine asked. "Because you want to be in government someday. You want to be elected. And they won't elect you if your opponents can dig up the fact that your brother and sister both died in suspicious accidents when they were little. Especially because of the letter I've put in my secret file, which will be opened in the event of my death."

"Don't give me that kind of crap," Peter said.

"It says, I didn't die a natural death. Peter killed me, and if he hasn't already killed Andrew, he will soon. Not enough to convict you, but enough to keep you from ever getting elected."

"You're his monitor now," said Peter. "You better watch him, day and night. You better be there."

"Ender and I aren't stupid. We scored as well as you did on everything. Better on some things. We're all such wonderfully bright children. You're not the smartest, Peter, just the biggest."

"Oh, I know. But there'll come a day when you aren't there with him, when you forget. And suddenly you'll remember, and you'll rush to him, and there he'll be perfectly all right. And the next time you won't worry so much, and you won't come so fast. And every time, he'll be all right. And you'll think that I forgot. Even though you'll remember that I said this, you'll think that I forgot. And years will pass. And then there'll be a terrible accident, and I'll find his body, and I'll cry and cry over him, and you'll remember this conversation, Vally, but you'll be ashamed of yourself for remembering, because you'll know that I changed, that it

really was an accident, that it's cruel of you even to remember what I said in a childhood quarrel. Except that it'll be true. I'm gonna save this up, and he's gonna die, and you won't do a thing, not a thing. But you go on believing that I'm just the biggest."

"The biggest asshole," Valentine said.

Peter leaped to his feet and started for her. She shied away. Ender pried off his mask. Peter flopped back on his bed and started to laugh. Loud, but with real mirth, tears coming to his eyes. "Oh, you guys are just super, just the biggest suckers on the planet earth."

"Now he's going to tell us it was all a joke," Valentine said.

"Not a joke, a game. I can make you guys believe anything. I can make you dance around like puppets." In a phony monster voice he said, "I'm going to kill you and chop you into little pieces and put you into the garbage hole." He laughed again. "Biggest suckers in the solar system."

Ender stood there watching him laugh and thought of Stilson, thought of how it felt to crunch into his body. This is who needed it. This is who should have got it.

As if she could read his mind, Valentine whispered, "No, Ender."

Peter suddenly rolled to the side, flipped off the bed, and got in position for a fight. "Oh, yes, Ender," he said. "Any time, Ender."

Ender lifted his right leg and took off the shoe. He held it up. "See there, on the toe? That's blood, Peter."

"Ooh. Ooh, I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die. Ender killed a capper-tiller and now he's gonna kill me."

There was no getting to him. Peter was a murderer at heart, and nobody knew it but Valentine and Ender.

Mother came home and commiserated with Ender about the monitor. Father came home and kept saying it was such a wonderful surprise, they had such fantastic children that the government told them to have three and now the government didn't want to take any of them after all, so here they were with three, they still had a Third... until Ender wanted to scream at him, I know I'm a Third, I know it, if you want I'll go away so you don't have to be embarrassed in front of everybody, I'm sorry I lost the monitor and now you have three kids and no obvious explanation, so inconvenient for you, I'm sorry sorry sorry.

He lay in bed staring upward into the darkness... On the

bunk above him, he could hear Peter turning and tossing restlessly. Then Peter slid off the bunk and walked out of the room. Ender heard the hushing sound of the toilet clearing; then Peter stood silhouetted in the doorway.

He thinks I'm asleep. He's going to kill me.

Peter walked to the bed, and sure enough, he did not lift himself up to his bed. Instead he came and stood by Ender's head.

But he did not reach for a pillow to smother Ender. He did not have a weapon.

He whispered, "Ender, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I know how it feels. I'm sorry, I'm your brother. I love you."

A long time later, Peter's even breathing said that he was asleep. Ender peeled the bandaid from his neck. And for the second time that day he cried.

Ender's Game

3

Graff

"The sister is our weak link. He really loves her."

"I know. She can undo it all, from the start. He won't want to leave her."

"So, what are you going to do?"

"Persuade him that he wants to come with us more than he wants to stay with her."

"How will you do that?"

"I'll lie to him."

"And if that doesn't work?"

"Then I'll tell the truth. We're allowed to do that in emergencies. We can't plan for everything, you know."

Ender wasn't very hungry during breakfast. He kept wondering what it would be like at school. Facing Stilson after yesterday's fight. What Stilson's friends would do. Probably nothing, but he couldn't be sure. He didn't want to go.

"You're not eating, Andrew," his mother said.

Peter came into the room. "Morning. Ender. Thanks for leaving your slimy washcloth in the middle of the shower."

"Just for you," Ender murmured.

"Andrew, you have to eat."

Ender held out his wrists, a gesture that said, So feed it to me through a needle.

"Very funny." Mother said. "I try to be concerned, but it makes no difference to my genius children."

"It was all your genes that made us, Mom." said Peter. "We sure didn't get any from Dad."

"I heard that," Father said, not looking up from the news that was being displayed on the table while he ate.

"It would've been wasted if you hadn't."

The table beeped. Someone was at the door.

"Who is it?" Mother asked.

Father thumbed a key and a man appeared on the video.

He was wearing the only military uniform that meant anything anymore, the I.F., the International Fleet.

“I thought it was over,” said Father.

Peter said nothing, just poured milk over his cereal.

And Ender thought, Maybe I won't have to go to school today after all.

Father coded the door open and got up from the table. “I'll see to it,” he said. "Stay and eat.”

They stayed, but they didn't eat. A few moments later, Father came back into the room and beckoned to Mother.

“You're in deep poo,” said Peter. "They found out what you did to Stilson, and now they're gonna make you do time out in the Belt.”

"I'm only six, moron. I'm a juvenile.”

"You're a Third, turd. You've got no rights.”

Valentine came in, her hair in a sleepy halo around her face. "Where's Mom and Dad? I'm too sick to go to school.”

“Another oral exam, huh?” Peter said.

“Shut up, Peter,” said Valentine.

“You should relax and enjoy it,” said Peter. "It could be worse.”

"I don't know how.”

"It could be an anal exam.”

“Hyuk hyuk,” Valentine said. "Where are Mother and Father?”

"Talking to a guy from I.F.”

Instinctively she looked at Ender. After all, for years they had expected someone to come and tell them that Ender had passed, that Ender was needed.

“That's right, look at him,” Peter said. “But it might he me, you know. They might have realized I was the best of the lot after all.” Peter's feelings were hurt, and so he was being a snot, as usual.

The door opened. “Ender,” said Father, "you better come in here.”

“Sorry, Peter,” Valentine taunted.

Father glowered. "Children, this is no laughing matter.”

Ender followed Father into the parlor. The I.F. officer rose to his feet when they entered, but he did not extend a hand to Ender.

Mother was twisting her wedding band on her finger. “Andrew,” she said. "I never thought you were the kind to get in a fight.”

“The Stilson boy is in the hospital,” Father said. "You

really did a number on him. With your shoe, Ender, that wasn't exactly fair."

Ender shook his head. He had expected someone from the school to come about Stilson, not an officer of the fleet. This was more serious than he had thought. And yet he couldn't think what else he could have done.

"Do you have any explanation for your behavior, young man?" asked the officer.

Ender shook his head again. He didn't know what to say, and he was afraid to reveal himself to be any more monstrous than his actions had made him out to be. I'll take it, whatever the punishment is, he thought. Let's get it over with.

"We're willing to consider extenuating circumstances," the officer said. "But I must tell you it doesn't look good. Kicking him in the groin, kicking him repeatedly in the face and body when he was down-- sounds like you really enjoyed it."

"I didn't," Ender whispered.

"Then why did you do it?"

"He had his gang there," Ender said.

"So? This excuses anything?"

"No."

"Tell me why you kept on kicking him. You had already won."

"Knocking him down won the first fight. I wanted to win all the next ones, too, right then, so they'd leave me alone." Ender couldn't help it, he was too afraid, too ashamed of his own acts: though he tried not to, he cried again. Ender did not like to cry and rarely did; now, in less than a day, he had done it three times. And each time was worse. To cry in front of his mother and father and this military man, that was shameful. "You took away the monitor," Ender said. "I had to take care of myself, didn't I?"

"Ender, you should have asked a grown-up for help," Father began.

But the officer stood up and stepped across the room to Ender. He held out his hand. "My name is Graff. Ender. Colonel Hyrum Graff. I'm director of primary training at Battle School in the Belt. I've come to invite you to enter the school."

After all. "But the monitor--"

"The final step in your testing was to see what would happen if the monitor comes off. We don't always do it that

way, but in your case--"

"And I passed?"

Mother was incredulous. "Putting the Stilson boy in the hospital? What would you have done if Andrew had killed him, given him a medal?"

"It isn't what he did, Mrs. Wiggin. It's why." Colonel Graff handed her a folder full of papers. "Here are the requisitions. Your son has been cleared by the I.F. Selective Service. Of course we already have your consent, granted in writing at the time conception was confirmed, or he could not have been born. He has been ours from then, if he qualified."

Father's voice was trembling as he spoke. "It's not very kind of you, to let us think you didn't want him, and then to take him after all."

"And this charade about the Stilson boy," Mother said.

"It wasn't a charade, Mrs. Wiggin. Until we knew what Ender's motivation was, we couldn't be sure he wasn't another-- we had to know what the action meant. Or at least what Ender believed that it meant."

"Must you call him that stupid nickname?" Mother began to cry.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Wiggin. But that's the name he calls himself."

"What are you going to do, Colonel Graff?" Father asked. "Walk out the door with him now?"

"That depends," said Graff.

"On what?"

"On whether Ender wants to come."

Mother's weeping turned to bitter laughter. "Oh, so it's voluntary after all, how sweet!"

"For the two of you, the choice was made when Ender was conceived. But for Ender, the choice has not been made at all. Conscripts make good cannon fodder, but for officers we need volunteers."

"Officers?" Ender asked. At the sound of his voice, the others fell silent.

"Yes," said Graff. "Battle School is for training future starship captains and commodores of flotillas and admirals of the fleet."

"Let's not have any deception here!" Father said angrily. "How many of the boys at the Battle School actually end up in command of ships!"

"Unfortunately, Mr. Wiggin, that is classified

information. But I can say that none of our boys who makes it through the first year has ever failed to receive a commission as an officer. And none has served in a position of lower rank than chief executive officer of an interplanetary vessel. Even in the domestic defense forces within our own solar system, there's honor to be had."

"How many make it through the first year?" asked Ender.

"All who want to," said Graff.

Ender almost said, I want to. But he held his tongue. This would keep him out of school, but that was stupid, that was just a problem for a few days. It would keep him away from Peter-- that was more important, that might be a matter of life itself. But to leave Mother and Father, and above all, to leave Valentine. And become a soldier. Ender didn't like fighting. He didn't like Peter's kind, the strong against the weak, and he didn't like his own kind either, the smart against the stupid.

"I think," Graff said, "that Ender and I should have a private conversation."

"No," Father said.

"I won't take him without letting you speak to him again," Graff said. "And you really can't stop me."

Father glared at Graff a moment longer, then got up and left the room. Mother paused to squeeze Ender's hand. She closed the door behind her when she left.

"Ender," Graff said, "if you come with me, you won't be back here for a long time. There aren't any vacations from Battle School. No visitors, either. A full course of training lasts until you're sixteen years old-- you get your first leave, under certain circumstances, when you're twelve. Believe me, Ender, people change in six years, in ten years. Your sister Valentine will be a woman when you see her again, if you come with me. You'll be strangers. You'll still love her, Ender, but you won't know her. You see I'm not pretending it's easy."

"Mom and Daddy?"

"I know you, Ender. I've been watching the monitor disks for some time. You won't miss your mother and father, not much, not for long. And they won't miss you long, either."

Tears came to Ender's eyes, in spite of himself. He turned his face away, but would not reach up to wipe them.

"They do love you, Ender. But you have to understand what your life has cost them. They were born religious, you

know. Your father was baptized with the name John Paul Wieczorek. Catholic. The seventh of nine children."

Nine children. That was unthinkable. Criminal.

"Yes, well, people do strange things for religion. You know the sanctions, Ender-- they were not as harsh then, but still not easy. Only the first two children had a free education. Taxes steadily rose with each new child. Your father turned sixteen and invoked the Noncomplying Families Act to separate himself from his family. He changed his name, renounced his religion, and vowed never to have more than the allotted two children. He meant it. All the shame and persecution he went through as a child-- he vowed no child of his would go through it. Do you understand?"

"He didn't want me."

"Well, no one wants a Third anymore. You can't expect them to be glad. But your father and mother are a special case. They both renounced their religions-- your mother was a Mormon-- but in fact their feelings are still ambiguous. Do you know what ambiguous means?"

"They feel both ways."

"They're ashamed of having come from noncompliant families. They conceal it. To the degree that your mother refuses to admit to anyone that she was born in Utah, lest they suspect. Your father denies his Polish ancestry, since Poland is still a noncompliant nation, and under international sanction because of it. So, you see, having a Third, even under the government's direct instructions, undoes everything they've been trying to do."

"I know that."

"But it's more complicated than that. Your father still named you with legitimate saints' names. In fact, he baptized all three of you himself as soon as he got you home after you were born. And your mother objected. They quarreled over it each time, not because she didn't want you baptized, but because she didn't want you baptized Catholic. They haven't really given up their religion. They look at you and see you as a badge of pride, because they were able to circumvent the law and have a Third. But you're also a badge of cowardice, because they dare not go further and practice the noncompliance they still feel is right. And you're a badge of public shame, because at every step you interfere with their efforts at assimilation into normal complying society."

"How can you know all this?"

"We monitored your brother and sister, Ender. You'd be

amazed at how sensitive the instruments are. We were connected directly to your brain. We heard all that you heard, whether you were listening carefully or not. Whether you understood or not. We understand."

"So my parents love me and don't love me?"

"They love you. The question is whether they want you here. Your presence in this house is a constant disruption. A source of tension. Do you understand?"

"I'm not the one who causes tension."

"Not anything you do, Ender. Your life itself. Your brother hates you because you are living proof that he wasn't good enough. Your parents resent you because of all the past they are trying to evade."

"Valentine loves me."

"With all her heart. Completely, unstintingly, she's devoted to you, and you adore her. I told you it wouldn't be easy."

"What is it like, there?"

"Hard work. Studies, just like school here, except we put you into mathematics and computers much more heavily. Military history. Strategy and tactics. And above all, the Battle Room."

"What's that?"

"War games. All the boys are organized into armies. Day after day, in zero gravity, there are mock battles. Nobody gets hurt, but winning and losing matter. Everybody starts as a common soldier, taking orders. Older boys are your officers, and it's their duty to train you and command you in battle. More than that I can't tell you. It's like playing buggers and astronauts-- except that you have weapons that work, and fellow soldiers fighting beside you, and your whole future and the future of the human race depends on how well you learn, how well you fight. It's a hard life, and you won't have a normal childhood. Of course, with your mind, and as a Third to boot, you wouldn't have a particularly normal childhood anyway."

"All boys?"

"A few girls. They don't often pass the tests to get in. Too many centuries of evolution are working against them. None of them will be like Valentine, anyway. But there'll be brothers there, Ender."

"Like Peter?"

"Peter wasn't accepted, Ender, for the very reasons that you hate him."

"I don't hate him. I'm just--"

"Afraid of him. Well, Peter isn't all bad, you know. He was the best we'd seen in a long time. We asked your parents to choose a daughter next-- they would have anyway-- hoping that Valentine would be Peter, but milder. She was too mild. And so we requisitioned you."

"To be half Peter and half Valentine."

"If things worked out right."

"Am I?"

"As far as we can tell. Our tests are very good, Ender. But they don't tell us everything. In fact, when it comes down to it, they hardly tell us anything. But they're better than nothing." Graff leaned over and took Ender's hands in his. "Ender Wiggin, if it were just a matter of choosing the best and happiest future for you, I'd tell you to stay home. Stay here, grow up, be happy. There are worse things than being a Third, worse things than a big brother who can't make up his mind whether to be a human being or a jackal. Battle School is one of those worse things. But we need you. The buggers may seem like a game to you now, Ender, but they damn near wiped us out last time. But it wasn't enough. They had us cold, outnumbered and outweaponed. The only thing that saved us was that we had the most brilliant military commander we've ever found. Call it fate, call it God, call it damnfool luck, we had Mazer Rackham."

"But we don't have him now, Ender. We've scraped together everything mankind could produce, a fleet that makes the one they sent against us last time seem like a bunch of kids playing in a swimming pool. We have some new weapons, too. But it might not be enough, even so. Because in the eighty years since the last war, they've had as much time to prepare as we have. We need the best we can get, and we need them fast. Maybe you're not going to work out for us, and maybe you are. Maybe you'll break down under the pressure, maybe it'll ruin your life, maybe you'll hate me for coming here to your house today. But if there's a chance that because you're with the fleet, mankind might survive and the buggers might leave us alone forever then I'm going to ask you to do it. To come with me."

Ender had trouble focusing on Colonel Graff. The man looked far away and very small, as if Ender could pick him up with tweezers and drop him in a pocket. To leave everything here, and go to a place that was very hard, with no Valentine, no Mom and Dad.

And then he thought of the films of the buggers that everyone had to see at least once a year. The Scathing of China. The Battle of the Belt. Death and suffering and terror. And Mazer Rackham and his brilliant maneuvers, destroying an enemy fleet twice his size and twice his firepower, using the little human ships that seemed so frail and weak. Like children fighting with grown-ups. And we won.

“I'm afraid,” said Ender quietly. "But I'll go with you.”

“Tell me again,” said Graff.

"It's what I was born for, isn't it? If I don't go, why am I alive?”

“Not good enough,” said Graff.

“I don't want to go,” said Ender, "but I will.”

Graff nodded. "You can change your mind. Up until the time you get in my car with me, you can change your mind. After that, you stay at the pleasure of the International Fleet. Do you understand that?”

Ender nodded.

"All right. Let's tell them.”

Mother cried. Father held Ender tight. Peter shook his hand and said, “You lucky little pinheaded fart-eater.” Valentine kissed him and left her tears on his cheek.

There was nothing to pack. No belongings to take. "The school provides everything you need, from uniforms to school supplies. And as for toys-- there's only one game.”

“Good-bye,” Ender said to his family. He reached up and took Colonel Graff's hand and walked out the door with him.

“Kill some buggers for me!” Peter shouted.

“I love you, Andrew!” Mother called.

“We'll write to you!” Father said.

And as he got into the car that waited silently in the corridor, he heard Valentine's anguished cry. "Come back to me! I love you forever!”

Ender's Game

4

Launch

"With Ender, we have to strike a delicate balance. Isolate him enough that he remains creative-- otherwise he'll adopt the system here and we'll lose him. At the same time, we need to make sure he keeps a strong ability to lead."

"If he earns rank, he'll lead."

"lt isn't that simple. Mazer Rackham could handle his little fleet and win. By the time this war happens, there'll be too much, even for a genius. Too many little coats. He has to work smoothly with his subordinates."

"Oh. good. He has to be a genius and nice. too."

"Not nice. Nice will let the buggers have us all,"

"So you're going to isolate him."

"I'll have him completely separated from the rest of the boys by the time we get to the School."

"I have no doubt of it. I'll be waiting for you to get here. I watched the vids of what he did to the Stilson boy. This is not a sweet little kid you're bringing up here."

"That's where you're mistaken. He's even sweeter. But don't worry. We'll purge that in a hurry."

"Sometimes I think you enjoy breaking these little geniuses."

"There is an art to it, and I'm very, very good at it. But enjoy? Well, maybe. When they put back the pieces afterward, and it makes them better."

"You're a monster."

"Thanks. Does this mean I get a raise?"

"Just a medal. The budget isn't inexhaustible."

They say that weightlessness can cause disorientation, especially in children, whose sense of direction isn't yet secure. But Ender was disoriented before he left Earth's gravity. Before the shuttle launch even began.

There were nineteen other boys in his launch. They filed out of the bus and into the elevator. They talked and joked

and bragged and laughed. Ender kept his silence. He noticed how Graff and the other officers were watching them. Analyzing. Everything we do means something, Ender realized. Them laughing. Me not laughing.

He toyed with the idea of trying to be like the other boys. But he couldn't think of any jokes, and none of theirs seemed funny. Wherever their laughter came from, Ender couldn't find such a place in himself. He was afraid, and fear made him serious.

They had dressed him in a uniform, all in a single piece; it felt funny not to have a belt cinched around his waist. He felt baggy and naked, dressed like that. There were TV cameras going, perched like animals on the shoulders of crouching, prowling men. The men moved slowly, catlike, so the camera motion would be smooth. Ender caught himself moving smoothly, too.

He imagined himself being on TV, in an interview. The announcer asking him, How do you feel, Mr. Wiggin? Actually quite well, except hungry. Hungry? Oh, yes, they don't let you eat for twenty hours before the launch. How interesting, I never knew that. All of us are quite hungry, actually. And all the while, during the interview, Ender and the TV guy would slink along smoothly in front of the cameraman, taking long, lithe strides. For the first time, Ender felt like laughing. He smiled. The other boys near him were laughing at the moment, too, for another reason. They think I'm smiling at their joke, thought Ender. But I'm smiling at something much funnier.

“Go up the ladder one at a time,” said an officer. "When you come to an aisle with empty seats, take one. There aren't any window seats.”

It was a joke. The other boys laughed.

Ender was near the last, but not the very last. The TV cameras did not give up, though. Will Valentine see me disappear into the shuttle? He thought of waving at her, of running to the cameraman and saying, “Can I tell Valentine good-bye?” He didn't know that it would be censored out of the tape if he did, for the boys soaring out to Battle School were all supposed to be heroes. They weren't supposed to miss anybody. Ender didn't know about the censorship, but he did know that running to the cameras would be wrong.

He walked the short bridge to the door in the shuttle. He noticed that the wall to his right was carpeted like a floor. That was where the disorientation began. The moment he

thought of the wall as a floor, he began to feel like he was walking on a wall. He got to the ladder, and noticed that the vertical surface behind it was also carpeted. I am climbing up the floor. Hand over hand, step by step.

And then, for fun, he pretended that he was climbing down the wall. He did it almost instantly in his mind, convinced himself against the best evidence of gravity. He found himself gripping the seat tightly, even though gravity pulled him firmly against it.

The other boys were bouncing on their seats a little, poking and pushing, shouting. Ender carefully found the straps, figured out how they fit together to hold him at crotch, waist, and shoulders. He imagined the ship dangling upside down on the undersurface of the Earth, the giant fingers of gravity holding them firmly in place. But we will slip away, he thought. We are going to fall off this planet.

He did not know its significance at the time. Later, though, he would remember that it was even before he left Earth that he first thought of it as a planet, like any other, not particularly his own.

“Oh, already figured it out,” said Graff. He was standing on the ladder.

“Coming with us?” Ender asked.

“I don't usually come down for recruiting,” Graff said. “I'm kind of in charge there. Administrator of the School. Like a principal. They told me I had to come back or I'd lose my job.” He smiled.

Ender smiled back. He felt comfortable with Graff. Graff was good. And he was principal of the Battle School. Ender relaxed a little. He would have a friend there.

The other boys were belted in place, those who hadn't done as Ender did. Then they waited for an hour while a TV at the front of the shuttle introduced them to shuttle flight, the history of space flight, and their possible future with the great starships of the I.F. Very boring stuff. Ender had seen such films before.

Except that he had not been belted into a seat inside the shuttle. Hanging upside down from the belly of Earth.

The launch wasn't bad. A little scary. Some jolting, a few moments of panic that this might be the first failed launch in the history of the shuttle. The movies hadn't made it plain how much violence you could experience, lying on your back in a soft chair.

Then it was over, and he really was hanging by the

straps, no gravity anywhere.

But because he had already reoriented himself, he was not surprised when Graff came up the ladder backward, as if he were climbing down to the front of the shuttle. Nor did it bother him when Graff hooked his feet under a rung and pushed off with his hands, so that suddenly he swung upright, as if this were an ordinary airplane.

The reorientations were too much for some. One boy gagged; Ender understood then why they had been forbidden to eat anything for twenty hours before the launch. Vomit in null gravity wouldn't be fun.

But for Ender, Graff's gravity game was fun, And he carried it further, imagining that Graff was actually hanging upside down from the center aisle, and then picturing him sticking straight out from a side wall. Gravity could go any which way. However I want it to go. I can make Graff stand on his head and he doesn't even know it.

"What do you think is so funny, Wiggin?"

Graff's voice was sharp and angry. What did I do wrong, thought Ender. Did I laugh out loud?

“I asked you a question, soldier!” barked Graff.

Oh yes. This is the beginning of the training routine. Ender had seen some military shows on TV, and they always shouted a lot at the beginning of training before the soldier and the officer became good friends.

“Yes sir,” Ender said.

"Well answer it, then!”

"I thought of you hanging upside down by your feet. I thought it was funny.”

It sounded stupid, now, with Graff looking at him coldly. "To you I suppose it is funny. Is it funny to anybody else here?”

Murmurs of no.

“Well why isn't it?” Graff looked at them all with contempt. "Scumbrains, that's what we've got in this launch. Pinheaded little morons. Only one of you had the brains to realize that in null gravity directions are whatever you conceive them to be. Do you understand that, Shafts?”

The boy nodded.

"No you didn't. Of course you didn't. Not only stupid, but a liar too. There's only one boy on this launch with any brains at all, and that's Ender Wiggin. Take a good look at him, little boys. He's going to he a commander when you're still in diapers up there. Because he knows how to think in

null gravity, and you just want to throw up."

This wasn't the way the show was supposed to go. Graff was supposed to pick on him, not set him up as the best. They were supposed to be against each other at first, so they could become friends later.

"Most of you are going to ice out. Get used to that, little boys. Most of you are going to end up in Combat School, because you don't have the brains to handle deep-space piloting. Most of you aren't worth the price of bringing you up here to Battle School because you don't have what it takes. Some of you might make it. Some of you might be worth something to humanity. But don't bet on it. I'm betting on only one."

Suddenly Graff did a backflip and caught the ladder with his hands, then swung his feet away from the ladder. Doing a handstand, if the floor was down. Dangling by his hands, if the floor was up. Hand over hand he swung himself back along the aisle to his seat.

"Looks like you've got it made here," whispered the boy next to him.

Ender shook his head.

"Oh, won't even talk to me?" the boy said.

"I didn't ask him to say that stuff," Ender whispered.

He felt a sharp pain on the top of his head. Then again. Some giggles from behind him. The boy in the next seat back must have unfastened his straps. Again a blow to the head. Go away, Ender thought. I didn't do anything to you.

Again a blow to the head. Laughter from the boys. Didn't Graff see this? Wasn't he going to stop it? Another blow. Harder. It really hurt. Where was Graff?

Then it became clear. Graff had deliberately caused it. It was worse than the abuse in the shows. When the sergeant picked on you, the others liked you better. But when the officer prefers you, the others hate you.

"Hey, fart-eater," came the whisper from behind him. He was hit in the head again. "Do you like this? Hey, super-brain, this is fun?" Another blow, this one so hard that Ender cried out softly with the pain.

If Graff was setting him up, there'd be no help unless he helped himself. He waited until he thought another blow was about to come. Now, he thought. And yes, the blow was there. It hurt, but Ender was already trying to sense the coming of the next blow. Now. And yes, right on time. I've got you, Ender thought.

Just as the next blow was coming, Ender reached up with both hands, snatched the boy by the wrist, and then pulled down on the arm, hard.

In gravity, the boy would have been jammed against Ender's seat back, hurting his chest. In null gravity, however, he flipped over the seat completely, up toward the ceiling. Ender wasn't expecting it. He hadn't realized how null gravity magnified even a child's strength. The boy sailed through the air, bouncing against the ceiling, then down against another boy in his seat, then out into the aisle, his arms flailing until he screamed as his body slammed into the bulkhead at the front of the compartment, his left arm twisted under him.

It took only seconds. Graff was already there, snatching the boy out of the air. Deftly he propelled him down the aisle toward the other man. “Left arm. Broken. I think,” he said. In moments the boy had been given a drug and lay quietly in the air as the officer ballooned a splint around his arm.

Ender felt sick. He had only meant to catch the boy's arm. No. No, he had meant to hurt him, and had pulled with all his strength. He hadn't meant it to be so public, but the boy was feeling exactly the pain Ender had meant him to feel. Null gravity had betrayed him, that was all. I am Peter. I'm just like him. And Ender hated himself.

Graff stayed at the front of the cabin. "What are you, slow learners? In your feeble little minds, haven’t you picked up one little fact? You were brought here to be soldiers. In your old schools, in your old families, maybe you were the big shot, maybe you were tough, maybe you were smart. But we chose the best of the best, and that's the only kind of kid you're going to meet now. And when I tell you Ender Wiggin is the best in this launch, take the hint, pinheads. Don't mess with him. Little boys have died in Battle School before. Do I make myself clear?”

There was silence the rest of the launch. The boy sitting next to Ender was scrupulously careful not to touch him.

I am not a killer, Ender said to himself over and over. I am not Peter. No matter what he says, I wouldn't. I'm not. I was defending myself. I bore it a long time. I was patient. I'm not what he said.

A voice over the speaker told them they were approaching the school; it took twenty minutes to decelerate and dock. Ender lagged behind the others.

They were not unwilling to let him be the last to leave the shuttle, climbing upward in the direction that had been

down when they embarked. Graff was waiting at the end of the narrow tube that led from the shuttle into the heart of the Battle School.

“Was it a good flight, Ender?” Graff asked cheerfully.

“I thought you were my friend.” Despite himself, Ender's voice trembled.

Graff looked puzzled. "Whatever gave you that idea, Ender?”

“Because you--” Because you spoke nicely to me, and honestly. "You didn't lie.”

“I won't lie now, either,” said Graff. "My job isn't to be friends. My job is to produce the best soldiers in the world. In the whole history of the world. We need a Napoleon. An Alexander. Except that Napoleon lost in the end, and Alexander flamed out and died young. We need a Julius Caesar, except that he made himself dictator, and died for it. My job is to produce such a creature, and all the men and women he'll need to help him. Nowhere in that does it say I have to make friends with children.”

"You made them hate me.”

"So? What will you do about it? Crawl into a corner? Start kissing their little backsides so they'll love you again? There's only one thing that will make them stop hating you. And that's being so good at what you do that they can't ignore you. I told them you were the best. Now you damn well better be.”

"What if I can't?”

"Then too bad. Look, Ender. I'm sorry if you're lonely and afraid. But the buggers are out there. Ten billion, a hundred billion, a million billion of them, for all we know. With as many ships, for all we know. With weapons we can't understand. And a willingness to use those weapons to wipe us out. It isn't the world at stake, Ender. Just us. Just humankind. As far as the rest of the earth is concerned, we could be wiped out and it would adjust, it would get on with the next step in evolution. But humanity doesn't want to die. As a species, we have evolved to survive. And the way we do it is by straining and straining and, at last, every few generations, giving birth to genius. The one who invents the wheel. And light. And flight. The one who builds a city, a nation, an empire. Do you understand any of this?”

Ender thought he did, but wasn't sure, and so said nothing.

"No. Of course not. So I'll put it bluntly. Human beings

are free except when humanity needs them. Maybe humanity needs you. To do something. Maybe humanity needs me-- to find out what you're good for. We might both do despicable things, Ender, but if humankind survives, then we were good tools."

"Is that all? Just tools?"

"Individual human beings are all tools, that the others use to help us all survive."

"That's a lie."

"No. It's just a half truth. You can worry about the other half after we win this war."

"It'll be over before I grow up," Ender said.

"I hope you're wrong," said Grail. "By the way, you aren't helping yourself at all, talking to me. The other boys are no doubt telling each other that old Ender Wiggin is back there licking up to Graff. If word once gets around that you're a teachers' boy, you're iced for sure."

In other words, go away and leave me alone. "Goodbye," Ender said. He pulled himself hand over hand along the tube where the other boys had gone.

Graff watched him go.

One of the teachers near him said, "Is that the one?"

"God knows," said Graff. "If it isn't Ender, then he'd better show up soon."

"Maybe it's nobody," said the teacher.

"Maybe. But if that's the case, Anderson, then in my opinion God is a bugger. You can quote me on that."

"I will."

They stood in silence a while longer.

"Anderson."

"Mmm."

"The kid's wrong. I am his friend."

"I know."

"He's clean. Right to the heart, he's good."

"I've read the reports."

"Anderson, think what we're going to do to him."

Anderson was defiant. "We're going to make him the best military commander in history."

"And then put the fate of the world on his shoulders. For his sake, I hope it isn't him. I do."

"Cheer up. The buggers may kill us all before he graduates."

Graff smiled. "You're right. I feel better already."

Ender's Game

5

Games

"You have my admiration. Breaking an arm-- that was a master stroke."

"That was an accident."

"Really? And I've already commended you in your official report."

"It's too strong. It makes that other little bastard into a hero. It could screw up training for a lot of kids. I thought he might call for help."

"Call for help? I thought that was what you valued most in him that he settles his own problems. When he's out there surrounded by an enemy fleet, there ain't gonna be nobody to help him if he calls."

"Who would have guessed the little sucker'd be out of his seat? And that he'd land just wrong against the bulkhead?"

"Just one more example of the stupidity of the military. If you had any brains, you'd be in a real career, like selling life insurance."

"You, too, mastermind."

"We've just got to face the fact that we're second rate. With the fate of humanity in our hands. Gives you a delicious feeling of power, doesn't it? Especially because this time if we lose there won't be any criticism of us at all."

"I never thought of it that way. But let's not lose."

"See how Ender handles it. If we've already lost him, if he can't handle this, who next? Who else?"

"I'll make up a list."

"In the meantime, figure out how to unlose Ender."

"I told you. His isolation can't be broken. He can never come to believe that anybody will ever help him out. ever. If he once thinks there's an easy way out, he's wrecked."

"You're right. That would be terrible, if he believed he had a friend."

"He can have friends. It's parents he can't have."

The other boys had already chosen their bunks when

Ender arrived. Ender stopped in the doorway of the dormitory, looking for the sole remaining bed. The ceiling was low Ender could reach up and touch it. A child-size room, with the bottom bunk resting on the floor. The other boys were watching him, cornerwise. Sure enough, the bottom bunk right by the door was the only empty bed. For a moment it occurred to Ender that by letting the others put him in the worst place, he was inviting later bullying. Yet he couldn't very well oust someone else.

So he smiled broadly. “Hey, thanks,” he said. Not sarcastically at all. He said it as sincerely as if they had reserved for him the best position. "I thought I was going to have to ask for low bunk by the door.”

He sat down and looked in the locker that stood open at the foot of the bunk. There was a paper taped to the inside of the door.

Place your hand on the scanner
at the head of your bunk
and speak your name twice.

Ender found the scanner, a sheet of opaque plastic. He put his left hand on it and said, "Ender Wiggin. Ender Wiggin.”

The scanner glowed green for a moment. Ender closed his locker and tried to reopen it. He couldn't. Then he put his hand on the scanner and said, “Ender Wiggin.” The locker popped open. So did three other compartments.

One of them contained four jumpsuits like the one he was wearing, and one white one. Another compartment contained a small desk, just like the ones at school. So they weren't through with studies yet.

It was the largest compartment that contained the prize. It looked like a spacesuit at first glance, complete with helmet and gloves. But it wasn't. There was no airtight seal. Still, it would effectively cover the whole body. It was thickly padded. It was also a little stiff.

And there was a pistol with it. A lasergun, it looked like, since the end was solid, clear glass. But surely they wouldn't let children have lethal weapons--

“Not laser,” said a man. Ender looked up. It was one he hadn't seen before. A young and kind-looking man. "But it has a tight enough beam. Well-focused. You can aim it and make a three-inch circle of light on a wall a hundred meters

off."

"What's it for?" Ender asked.

"One of the games we play during recreation. Does anyone else have his locker open?" The man looked around. "I mean, have you followed directions and coded in your voices and hands? You can't get into the lockers until you do. This room is your home for the first year or so here at the Battle School, so get the bunk you want and stay with it. Ordinarily we let you elect your chief officer and install him in the lower bunk by the door, but apparently that position has been taken. Can't recode the lockers now. So think about whom you want to choose. Dinner in seven minutes. Follow the lighted dots on the floor. Your color code is red yellow yellow-- whenever you're assigned a path to follow, it will be red yellow yellow, three dots side by side-- go where those lights indicate. What's your color code, boys?"

"Red, yellow, yellow."

"Very good. My name is Dap. I'm your mom for the next few months."

The boys laughed.

"Laugh all you like, but keep it in mind. If you get lost in the school, which is quite possible, don't go opening doors. Some of them lead outside." More laughter. "Instead just tell someone that your mom is Dap, and they'll call me. Or tell them your color, and they'll light up a path for you to get home. If you have a problem, come talk to me. Remember, I'm the only person here who's paid to be nice to you, but not too nice. Give me any lip and I'll break your face, OK?"

They laughed again. Dap had a room full of friends, Frightened children are so easy to win.

"Which way is down, anybody tell me?"

They told him.

"OK, that's true. But that direction is toward the outside. The ship is spinning, and that's what makes it feel like that is down. The floor actually curves around in that direction. Keep going long enough that way, and you come back to where you started. Except don't try it. Because up that way is teachers' quarters, and up that way is the bigger kids. And the bigger kids don't like Launchies butting in. You might get pushed around. In fact, you will get pushed around. And when you do, don't come crying to me. Got it? This is Battle School, not nursery school."

"What are we supposed to do, then?" asked a boy, a really small black kid who had a top hunk near Ender's.

"If you don't like getting pushed around, figure out for yourself what to do about it, but I warn you-- murder is strictly against the rules. So is any deliberate injury. I understand there was one attempted murder on the was up here. A broken arm. That kind of thing happens again, somebody ices out. You got it?"

"What's icing out?" asked the boy with his arm puffed up in a splint.

"Ice. Put out in the cold. Sent Earthside. Finished at Battle School."

Nobody looked at Ender.

"So, boys, if any of you are thinking of being troublemakers, at least be clever about it. OK?"

Dap left. They still didn't look at Ender.

Ender felt the fear growing in his belly. The kid whose arm he broke-- Ender didn't feel sorry for him. He was a Stilson. And like Stilson, he was already gathering a gang. A little knot of kids, several of the bigger ones, they were laughing at the far end of the room, and every now and then one of them would turn to look at Ender.

With all his heart, Ender wanted to go home. What did any of this have to do with saving the world? There was no monitor now. It was Ender against the gang again, only they were right in his room. Peter again, but without Valentine.

The fear stayed, all through dinner as no one sat by him in the mess hall. The other boys were talking about things-- the big scoreboard on one wall, the food, the bigger kids. Ender could only watch in isolation.

The scoreboards were team standings. Won-loss records, with the most recent scores. Some of the bigger boy's apparently had bets on the most recent games. Two teams, Manticore and Asp, had no recent score-- that box was flashing. Ender decided they must be playing right now.

He noticed that the older boys were divided into groups, according to the uniforms they wore. Some with different uniforms were talking together, but generally the groups each had their own area. Launchies-- their own group, and the two or three next older groups all had plain blue uniforms. But the big kids, the ones that were on teams, they were wearing much more flamboyant clothing. Ender tried to guess which ones went with which name. Scorpion and Spider were easy. So were Flame and Tide.

A bigger boy came to sit by him. Not just a little bigger-he looked to be twelve or thirteen. Getting his man's growth

started.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi,” Ender said.

"I'm Mick.”

"Ender.”

"That's a name?”

"Since I was little. It's what my sister called me.”

"Not a bad name here. Ender. Finisher. Hey.”

"Hope so.”

"Ender, you the bugger in your launch?”

Ender shrugged.

"I noticed you eating all alone. Every launch has one like that. Kid that nobody takes to right away. Sometimes I think the teachers do it on purpose. The teachers aren't very nice. You'll notice that.”

"Yeah.”

"So you the bugger?”

"I guess so.”

“Hey. Nothing to cry about, you know?” He gave Ender his roll, and took Ender's pudding. “Eat nutritious stuff. It'll keep you strong.” Mick dug into the pudding.

“What about you?” asked Ender.

"Me? I'm nothing. I'm a fart in the air conditioning. I'm always there, but most of the time nobody knows it.”

Ender smiled tentatively.

"Yeah, funny, but no joke. I got nowhere here. I'm getting big now. They're going to send me to my next school pretty soon. No way it'll be Tactical School for me. I've never been a leader, you see. Only the guys who get to be leaders have a shot at it.”

"How do you get to be a leader?”

"Hey, if I knew, you think I'd be like this? How many guys my size you see in here?”

Not many. Ender didn't say it.

"A few. I'm not the only half-iced bugger-fodder. A few of us. The other guys-- they're all commanders. All the guys from my launch have their own teams now. Not me.”

Ender nodded.

"Listen, little guy. I'm doing you a favor. Make friends. Be a leader. Kiss butts if you've got to, but if the other guys despise you-- you know what I mean?”

Ender nodded again.

"Naw, you don't know anything. You Launchies are all alike. You don't know nothing. Minds like space. Nothing

there. And if anything hits you, you fall apart. Look, when you end up like me, don't forget that somebody warned you. It's the last nice thing anybody's going to do for you."

"So why did you tell me?" asked Ender.

"What are you, a smart mouth? Shut up and eat."

Ender shut up and ate. He didn't like Mick. And he knew there was no chance he would end up like that. Maybe that was what the teachers were planning, but Ender didn't intend to fit in with their plans.

I will not be the bugger of my group, Ender thought. I didn't leave Valentine and Mother and Father to come here just to be iced.

As he lifted the fork to his mouth, he could feel his family around him, as they always had been. He knew just which way to turn his head to look up and see Mother, trying to get Valentine not to slurp. He knew just where Father would be, scanning the news on the table while pretending to be part of the dinner conversation. Peter, pretending to take a crushed pea out of his nose-- even Peter could he funny.

It was a mistake to think of them. He felt a sob rise in his throat and swallowed it down; he could not see his plate.

He could not cry. There was no chance that he would be treated with compassion. Dap was not Mother. Any sign of weakness would tell the Stilsons and Peters that this boy could be broken. Ender did what he always did when Peter tormented him. He began to count doubles. One, two, four, eight. sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four. And on, as high as he could hold the numbers in his head: 128, 256, 512, 1024, 2048, 4096, 8192, 16384, 32768, 65536, 131072, 262144. At 67108864 he began to be unsure-- had he slipped out a digit? Should he be in the ten millions or the hundred millions or just the millions? He tried doubling again and lost it. 1342 something. 16? Or 17738? It was gone. Start over again. All the doubling he could hold. The pain was gone. The tears were gone. He would not cry.

Until that night, when the lights went dim, and in the distance he could hear several boys whimpering for their mothers or fathers or dogs. He could not help himself. His lips formed Valentine's name. He could hear her voice laughing in the distance, just down the hall. He could see Mother passing his door, looking in to he sure he was all right. He could hear Father laughing at the video. It was all so clear, and it would never be that way again. I'll be old when I ever see them again, twelve at the earliest. Why did I

say yes? What was I such a fool for? Going to school would have been nothing. Facing Stilson every day. And Peter. He was a pissant. Ender wasn't afraid of him.

I want to go home, he whispered.

But his whisper was the whisper he used when he cried out in pain when Peter tormented him. The sound didn't travel farther than his own ears, and sometimes not that far.

And his tears could fall unwanted on his sheet, but his sobs were so gentle that they did not shake the bed; so quiet they could not be heard. But the ache was there, thick in his throat and the front of his face, hot in his chest and in his eyes. I want to go home.

Dap came to the door that night and moved quietly among the beds, touching a hand here. Where he went there was more crying, not less. The touch of kindness in this frightening place was enough to push some over the edge into tears. Not Ender, though. When Dap came, his crying was over, and his face was dry. It was the lying face he presented to Mother and Father, when Peter had been cruel to him and he dared not let it show. Thank you for this, Peter. For dry eyes and silent weeping. You taught me how to hide anything I felt. More than ever, I need that now.

There was school. Every day, hours of classes. Reading. Numbers. History. Videos of the bloody battles in space, the Marines spraying their guts all over the walls of the bugger ships. Holos of clean wars of the fleet, ships turning into puffs of light as the spacecraft killed each other deftly in the deep night. Many things to learn. Ender worked as hard as anyone; all of them struggled for the first time in their lives, as for the first time in their lives they competed with classmates who were at least as bright as they.

But the games-- that was what they lived for. That was what filled the hours between waking and sleeping.

Dap introduced them to the game room on their second day. It was up, way above the decks where the boys lived and worked. They climbed ladders to where the gravity weakened, and there in the cavern they saw the dazzling lights of the games.

Some of the games they knew; some they had even played at home. Simple ones and hard ones. Ender walked past the two-dimensional games on video and began to study

the games the bigger boys played, the holographic games with objects hovering in the air. He was the only Launchy in that part of the room, and every now and then one of the bigger boys would shove him out of the way. What're you doing here? Get lost. Fly off. And of course he would fly, in the lower gravity here, leave his feet and soar until he ran into something or someone.

Every time, though, he extricated himself and went back, perhaps to a different spot, to get a different angle on the game. He was too small to see the controls, how the game was actually done. That didn't matter. He got the movement of it in the air. The way the player dug tunnels in the darkness, tunnels of light, which the enemy ships would search for and then follow mercilessly until they caught the player's ship. The player could make traps: mines, drifting bombs, loops in the air that forced the enemy ships to repeat endlessly. Some of the players were clever. Others lost quickly.

Ender liked it better, though, when two boys played against each other. Then they had to use each other's tunnels, and it quickly became clear which of them were worth anything at the strategy of it.

Within an hour or so, it began to pall. Ender understood the regularities by then. Understood the rules the computer was following, so that he knew he could always, once he mastered the controls, outmaneuver the enemy. Spirals when the enemy was like this; loops when the enemy was like that. Lie in wait at one trap. Lay seven traps and then lure them like this. There was no challenge to it, then, just a matter of playing until the computer got so fast that no human reflexes could overcome it. That wasn't fun. It was the other boys he wanted to play. The boys who had been so trained by the computer that even when they played against each other they each tried to emulate the computer. Think like a machine instead of a boy.

I could beat them this way. I could beat them that way.

“I'd like a turn against you,” he said to the boy who had just won.

“Lawsy me, what is this?” asked the boy. "Is it a bug or a bugger?”

“A new flock of dwarfs just came aboard,” said another boy.

"But it talks. Did you know they could talk?”

“I see,” said Ender. "You're afraid to play me two out of

three."

"Beating you," said the boy, "would be as easy as pissing in the shower."

"And not half as fun," said another.

"I'm Ender Wiggin."

"Listen up, scrunchface. You nobody. Got that? You nobody, got that? You not anybody till you gots you first kill. Got that?"

The slang of the older boys had its own rhythm. Ender picked it up quick enough. "If I'm nobody, then how come you scared to play me two out of three?"

Now the other guys were impatient. "Kill the squirt quick and let's get on with it."

So Ender took his place at the unfamiliar controls. His hands were small, but the controls were simple enough. It took only a little experimentation to find out which buttons used certain weapons. Movement control was a standard wireball. His reflexes were slow at first. The other boy, whose name he still didn't know, got ahead quickly. But Ender learned a lot and was doing much better by the time the game ended.

"Satisfied, launchy?"

"Two out of three."

"We don't allow two out of three games."

"So you beat me the first time I ever touched the game," Ender said. "If you can't do it twice, you can't do it at all."

They played again, and this time Ender was deft enough to pull off a few maneuvers that the boy had obviously never seen before. His patterns couldn't cope with them. Ender didn't win easily, but he won.

The bigger boys stopped laughing and joking then. The third game went in total silence, Ender won it quickly and efficiently.

When the game ended, one of the older boys said, "Bout time they replaced this machine. Getting so any pinbrain can beat it now."

Not a word of congratulation. Just total silence as Ender walked away.

He didn't go far. Just stood off in the near distance and watched as the next players tried to use the things he had shown them. Any pinbrain? Ender smiled inwardly. They won't forget me.

He felt good. He had won something, and against older boys. Probably not the best of the older boys, but he no

longer had the panicked feeling that he might be out of his depth, that Battle School might he too much for him. All he had to do was watch the game and understand how things worked, and then he could use the system, and even excel.

It was the waiting and watching that cost the most. For during that time he had to endure. The boy whose arm he had broken was out for vengeance. His name, Ender quickly learned, was Bernard. He spoke his own name with a French accent, since the French, with their arrogant Separatism, insisted that the teaching of Standard not begin until the age of four, when the French language patterns were already set. His accent made him exotic and interesting; his broken arm made him a martyr; his sadism made him a natural focus for all those who loved pain in others.

Ender became their enemy.

Little things. Kicking his bed every time they went in and out of the door. Jostling him with his meal tray. Tripping him on the ladders. Ender learned quickly not to leave anything of his outside his lockers; he also learned to be quick on his feet, to catch himself. “Maladroit,” Bernard called him once, and the name stuck.

There were times when Ender was very angry. With Bernard, of course, anger was inadequate. It was the kind of person he was-- a tormentor. What enraged Ender was how willingly the others went along with him. Surely they knew there was no justice in Bernard's revenge. Surely they knew that he had struck first at Ender in the shuttle, that Ender had only been responding to violence. If they knew, they acted as if they didn't; even if they did not know, they should be able to tell from Bernard himself that he was a snake.

After all, Ender wasn't his only target. Bernard was setting up a kingdom, wasn't he?

Ender watched from the fringes of the group as Bernard established the hierarchy. Some of the boys were useful to him, and he flattered them outrageously. Some of the boys were willing servants, doing whatever he wanted even though he treated them with contempt.

But a few chafed under Bernard's rule.

Ender, watching, knew who resented Bernard. Shen was small, ambitious, and easily needled. Bernard had discovered that quickly, and started calling him Worm. “Because he's so small,” Bernard said, "and because he wriggles. Look how he shimmies his butt when he walks.”

Shen stormed off, but they only laughed louder. "Look at

his butt. See ya, Worm!”

Ender said nothing to Shen-- it would be too obvious, then, that he was starting his own competing gang. He just sat with his desk on his lap, looking as studious as possible.

He was not studying. He was telling his desk to keep sending a message into the interrupt queue every thirty seconds. The message was to everyone, and it was short and to the point. What made it hard was figuring out how to disguise who it was from, the way the teachers could. Messages from one of the boys always had their name automatically inserted. Ender hadn't cracked the teachers security system yet, so he couldn't pretend to be a teacher. But he was able to set up a file for a nonexistent student, whom he whimsically named God.

Only when the message was ready to go did he try to catch Shen's eye. Like all the other boys, he was watching Bernard and his cronies laugh and joke, making fun of the math teacher, who often stopped in midsentence and looked around as if he had been let off the bus at the wrong stop and didn't know where he was.

Eventually, though, Shen glanced around. Ender nodded to him, pointed to his desk, and smiled. Shen looked puzzled. Ender held up his desk a little and then pointed at it. Shen reached for his own desk. Ender sent the message then, Shen saw it almost at once. Shen read it, then laughed aloud. He looked at Ender as if to say, Did you do this? Ender shrugged, to say, I don't know who did it but it sure wasn't me.

Shen laughed again, and several of the other boys who were not close to Bernard's group got out their desks and looked. Every thirty seconds the message appeared on every desk, marched around the screen quickly, then disappeared. The boys laughed together.

“What's so funny?” Bernard asked, Ender made sure he was not smiling when Bernard looked around the room, imitating the fear that so many others felt. Shen, of course, smiled all the more defiantly. It took a moment; then Bernard told one of his boy's to bring out a desk. Together they read the message.

COVER YOUR BUTT. BERNARD IS WATCHING.
--GOD

Bernard went red with anger. “Who did this!” he shouted.

“God,” said Shen.

“It sure as hell wasn't you,” Bernard said. "This takes too much brains for a worm.”

Ender's message expired after five minutes. After a while, a message from Bernard appeared on his desk.

I KNOW IT WAS YOU.
--BERNARD

Ender didn't look up. He acted, in fact, as if he hadn't seen the message. Bernard just wants to catch me looking guilty. He doesn't know.

Of course, it didn't matter if he knew. Bernard would punish him all the more, because he had to rebuild his position. The one thing he couldn't stand was having the other boys laughing at him. He had to make clear who was boss. So Ender got knocked down in the shower that morning. One of Bernard's boys pretended to trip over him, and managed to plant a knee in his belly. Ender took it in silence. He was still watching, as far as the open war was concerned. He would do nothing.

But in the other war, the war of desks, he already had his next attack in place. When he got back from the shower, Bernard was raging, kicking beds and yelling at boys. "I didn't write it! Shut up!”

Marching constantly around every boy's desk was this message:

I LOVE YOUR BUTT. LET ME KISS IT.
--BERNARD

“I didn't write that message!” Bernard shouted. After the shouting had been going on for some time, Dap appeared at the door.

“What's the fuss?” he asked.

“Somebody's been writing messages using my name.” Bernard was sullen.

"What message.”

"It doesn't matter what message!”

“It does to me.” Dap picked up the nearest desk, which happened to belong to the boy' who bunked above Ender. Dap read it, smiled very slightly, gave back the desk.

“Interesting,” he said.

“Aren't you going to find out who did it?” demanded

Bernard.

“Oh, I know who did it,” Dap said.

Yes, Ender thought. The system was too easily broken. They mean us to break it, or sections of it. They know it was me.

“Well, who, then?” Bernard shouted.

“Are you shouting at me, soldier?” asked Dap, very softly.

At once the mood in the room changed. From rage on the part of Bernard's closest friends and barely contained mirth among the rest, all became somber. Authority was about to speak.

“No, sir,” said Bernard.

"Everybody knows that the system automatically puts on the name of the sender.”

“I didn't write that!” Bernard said.

“Shouting?” asked Dap.

“Yesterday someone sent a message that was signed GOD,” Bernard said.

“Really?” said Dap. “I didn't know he was signed onto the system.” Dap turned and left, and the room filled with laughter.

Bernard's attempt to be ruler of the room was broken--only a few stayed with him now. But they were the most vicious. And Ender knew that until he was through watching, it would go hard on him. Still, the tampering with the system had done its work, Bernard was contained, and all the boys who had some quality were free of him. Best of all, Ender had done it without sending him to the hospital. Much better this way.

Then he settled down to the serious business of designing a security system for his own desk, since the safeguards built into the system were obviously inadequate. If a six-year-old could break them down, they were obviously put there as a plaything, not serious security. Just another game that the teachers set up for us. And this is one I'm good at.

“How did you do that?” Shen asked him at breakfast.

Ender noted quietly that this was the first time another Launchy from his own class had sat with him at a meal. “Do what?” he asked.

"Send a message with a fake name. And Bernard's name! That was great. They're calling him Buttwatcher now. Just Watcher in front of the teachers, but everybody knows what

he's watching."

"Poor Bernard," Ender murmured. "And he's so sensitive."

"Come on, Ender. You broke into the system. How'd you do it?"

Ender shook his head and smiled. "Thanks for thinking I'm bright enough to do that. I just happened to see it first, that's all."

"OK, you don't have to tell me," said Shen. "Still, it was great." They ate in silence for a moment. "Do I wiggle my butt when I walk?"

"Naw." Ender said. "Just a little. Just don't take such big long steps, that's all."

Shen nodded.

"The only person who'd ever notice was Bernard."

"He's a pig." said Shen.

Ender shrugged. "On the whole, pigs aren't so bad."

Shen laughed. "You're right. I wasn't being fair to the pigs."

They laughed together, and two other Launchies joined them. Ender's isolation was over. The war was just beginning.

Ender's Game

6

The Giant's Drink

"We've had our disappointments in the past, hanging on for years, hoping they'll pull through, and then they don't. Nice thing about Ender, he's determined to ice within the first six months."

"Oh?"

"Don't you see what's going on here? He's stuck at the Giant's Drink in the mind game. Is the boy suicidal? You never mentioned it."

"Everybody gets the Giant sometime."

"But Ender won't leave it alone. Like Pinual."

"Everybody looks like Pinual at one time or another. But he's the only one who killed himself. I don't think it had anything to do with the Giant's Drink."

"You're betting my life on that. And look what he's done with his launch group."

"Wasn't his fault, you know."

"I don't care. His fault or not, he's poisoning that group. They're supposed to bond, and right where he stands there's a chasm a mile wide."

"I don't plan to leave him there very long, anyway."

"Then you'd better plan again. That launch is sick, and he's the source of the disease. He stays till it's cured."

"I was the source of the disease. I was isolating him, and it worked."

"Give him time. To see what he does with it."

"We don't have time."

"We don't have time to rush a kid ahead who has as much chance of being a monster as a military genius."

"Is this an order?"

"The recorders on, it's always on, your ass is covered, go to hell."

"If it's an order, then I'll--"

"It's an order. Hold him where he is until we see now he handles things in his launch group. Graff, you give me

ulcers."

"You wouldn't have ulcers if you'd leave the school to me and take care of the fleet yourself."

"The fleet is looking for a battle commander. There's nothing to take care of until you get me that."

They filed clumsily into the battleroom, like children in a swimming pool for the first time, clinging to the handholds along the side. Null gravity was frightening, disorienting; they soon found that things went better if they didn't use their feet at all.

Worse, the suits were confining. It was harder to make precise movements, since the suits bent just a bit slower, resisted a bit more than any clothing they had ever worn before.

Ender gripped the handhold and flexed his knees. He noticed that along with the sluggishness, the suit had an amplifying effect on movement. It was hard to get them started, but the suit's legs kept moving, and strongly, after his muscles had stopped. Give them a push this strong, and the suit pushes with twice the force. I'll be clumsy for a while. Better get started.

So, still grasping the handhold, he pushed off strongly with his feet.

Instantly he flipped around, his feet flying over his head, and landed fiat on his back against the wall. The rebound was stronger, it seemed, and his hands tore loose from the handhold. He flew across the battleroom, tumbling over and over.

For a sickening moment he tried to retain his old up-and-down orientation, his body attempting to right itself, searching for the gravity that wasn't there. Then he forced himself to change his view. He was hurtling toward a wall. That was down. And at once he had control of himself. He wasn't flying, he was falling. This was a dive. He could choose how he would hit the surface.

I'm going too fast to catch ahold and stay, but I can soften the impact, can fly off at an angle if I roll when I hit and use my feet--

It didn't work at all the way he had planned. He went off at an angle, but it was not the one he had predicted. Nor did he have time to consider. He hit another wall, this time too soon to have prepared for it. But quite accidentally he discovered a way to use his feet to control the rebound angle.

Now he was soaring across the room again, toward the other boys who still clung to the wall. This time he had slowed enough to be able to grip a rung. He was at a crazy angle in relation to the other boys, but once again his orientation had changed, and as far as he could tell, they were all lying on the floor, not hanging on a wall, and he was no more upside down than they were.

"What are you trying to do, kill yourself?" asked Shen.

"Try it," Ender said. "The suit keeps you from hurting yourself, and you can control your bouncing with your legs, like this." He approximated the movement he had made.

Shen shook his head-- he wasn't trying any fool stunt like that. But one boy did take off, not as fast as Ender had, because he didn't begin with a flip, but fast enough. Ender didn't even have to see his face to know that it was Bernard. And right after him, Bernard's best friend, Alai.

Ender watched them cross the huge room, Bernard struggling to orient himself to the direction he thought of as the floor, Alai surrendering to the movement and preparing to rebound from the wall. No wonder Bernard broke his arm in the shuttle, Ender thought. He tightens up when he's flying. He panics. Ender stored the information away for future reference.

And another bit of information, too. Alai did not push off in the same direction as Bernard. He aimed for a corner of the room. Their paths diverged more and more as they flew, and where Bernard made a clumsy, crunching landing and bounce on his wall, Alai did a glancing triple bounce on three surfaces near the corner that left him most of his speed and sent him flying off at a surprising angle. Alai shouted and whooped, and so did the boys watching him. Some of them forgot they were weightless and let go of the wall to clap their hands. Now they drifted lazily in many directions, waving their arms, trying to swim.

Now, that's a problem, thought Ender. What if you catch yourself drifting? There's no way to push off.

He was tempted to set himself adrift and try to solve the problem by trial and error. But he could see the others, their useless efforts at control, and he couldn't think of what he would do that they weren't already doing.

Holding onto the floor with one hand, he fiddled idly with the toy gun that was attached to his suit in front, just below the shoulder. Then he remembered the hand rockets sometimes used by marines when they did a boarding assault

on an enemy station. He pulled the gun from his suit and examined it. He had pushed all the buttons back in the room, but the gun did nothing there. Maybe here in the battleroom it would work. There were no instructions on it. No labels on the controls. The trigger was obvious-- he had had toy guns, as all children had, almost since infancy. There were two buttons that his thumb could easily reach, and several others along the bottom of the shaft that were almost inaccessible without using two hands. Obviously, the two buttons near his thumb were meant to be instantly usable.

He aimed the gun at the floor and pulled back on the trigger. He felt the gun grow instantly warm; when he let go of the trigger, it cooled at once. Also, a tiny circle of light appeared on the floor where he was aiming.

He thumbed the red button at the top of the gun, and pulled the trigger again. Same thing.

Then he pushed the white button. It gave a bright flash of light that illuminated a wide area, but not as intensely. The gun was quite cold when the button was pressed.

The red button makes it like a laser-- but it is not a laser, Dap had said-- while the white button makes it a lamp. Neither will be much help when it comes to maneuvering.

So everything depends on how you push off, the course you set when you start. It means we're going to have to get very good at controlling our launches and rebounds or we're all going to end up floating around in the middle of nowhere. Ender looked around the room. A few of the boys were drifting close to walls now, flailing their arms to catch a handhold. Most were bumping into each other and laughing; some were holding hands and going around in circles. Only a few, like Ender, were calmly holding onto the walls and watching.

One of them, he saw, was Alai. He had ended up on another wall not too far from Ender. On impulse, Ender pushed off and moved quickly toward Alai. Once in the air, he wondered what he would say. Alai was Bernard's friend. What did Ender have to say to him?

Still, there was no changing course now. So he watched straight ahead, and practiced making tiny leg and hand movements to control which way he was facing as he drifted. Too late, he realized that he had aimed too well. He was not going to land near Alai-- he was going to hit him.

“Here, snag my hand!” Alai called.

Ender held out his hand. Alai took the shock of impact

and helped Ender make a fairly gentle landing against the wall.

“That's good,” Ender said. "We ought to practice that kind of thing.”

“That's what I thought, only everybody's turning to butter out there,” Alai said. "What happens if we get out there together? We should be able to shove each other in opposite directions.”

"Yeah.”

"OK?”

It was an admission that all might not be right between them. Is it OK for us to do something together? Ender's answer was to take Alai by the wrist and get ready to push off.

“Ready?” said Alai. "Go.”

Since they pushed off with different amounts of force, they began to circle each other. Ender made some small hand movements, then shifted a leg. They slowed. He did it again. They stopped orbiting. Now they were drifting evenly.

“Packed head, Ender.” Alai said. It was high praise. "Let's push off before we run into that bunch.”

“And then let's meet over in that corner.” Ender did not want this bridge into the enemy camp to fail.

“Last one there saves farts in a milk bottle,” Alai said.

Then, slowly, steadily, they maneuvered until they faced each other, spread-eagled, hand to hand, knee to knee.

“And then we just scrunch?” asked Alai.

“I've never done this before either,” said Ender.

They pushed off. It propelled them faster than they expected. Ender ran into a couple of boys and ended up on a wall that he hadn't expected. It took him a moment to reorient and find the corner where he and Alai were to meet. Alai was already headed toward it. Ender plotted a course that would include two rebounds, to avoid the largest clusters of boys.

When Ender reached the corner, Alai had hooked his arms through two adjacent handholds and was pretending to doze.

"You win.”

“I want to see your fart collection,” Alai said.

"I stored it in your locker. Didn't you notice?”

"I thought it was my socks.”

"We don't wear socks anymore.”

“Oh yeah.” A reminder that they were both far from

home. It took some of the fun out of having mastered a bit of navigation.

Ender took his pistol and demonstrated what he had learned about the two thumb buttons.

“What does it do when you aim at a person?” asked Alai.

"I don't know.”

"Why don't we find out?”

Ender shook his head. "We might hurt somebody.”

"I meant why don't we shoot each other in the foot or something. I'm not Bernard, I never tortured cats for fun.”

"Oh.”

"It can't be too dangerous, or they wouldn't give these guns to kids.”

"We're soldiers now.”

"Shoot me in the foot.”

"No, you shoot me.”

"Let's shoot each other.”

They did. Immediately Ender felt the leg of the suit grow stiff, immobile at the knee and ankle joints.

“You frozen?” asked Alai.

"Stiff as a board.”

“Let's freeze a few,” Alai said. "Let's have our first war. Us against them.”

They grinned. Then Ender said, "Better invite Bernard.”

Alai cocked an eyebrow. "Oh?”

"And Shen.”

"That little slanty-eyed butt-wiggler?”

Ender decided that Alai was joking. "Hey, we can't all be niggers.”

Alai grinned. "My grandpa would've killed you for that.”

"My great great grandpa would have sold him first,”

"Let's go get Bernard and Shen and freeze these bugger-lovers.”

In twenty minutes, everyone in the room was frozen except Ender, Bernard, Shen, and Alai. The four of them sat there whooping and laughing until Dap came in.

“I see you've learned how to use your equipment,” he said. Then he did something to a control he held in his hand. Everybody drifted slowly toward the wall he was standing on. He went among the frozen boys, touching them and thawing their suits. There was a tumult of complaint that it wasn't fair how Bernard and Alai had shot them all when they weren't ready.

“Why weren't you ready?” asked Dap. "You had your

suits just as long as they did. You had just as many minutes flapping around like drunken ducks. Stop moaning and we'll begin."

Ender noticed that it was assumed that Bernard and Alai were the leaders of the battle. Well, that was fine. Bernard knew that Ender and Alai had learned to use the guns together. And Ender and Alai were friends. Bernard might believe that Ender had joined his group, but it wasn't so. Ender had joined a new group. Alai's group. Bernard had joined it too.

It wasn't obvious to everyone; Bernard still blustered and sent his cronies on errands. But Alai now moved freely through the whole room, and when Bernard was crazy, Alai could joke a little and calm him down. When it came time to choose their launch leader, Alai was the almost unanimous choice. Bernard sulked for a few days and then he was fine, and everyone settled into the new pattern. The launch was no longer divided into Bernard's in-group and Ender's outcasts. Alai was the bridge.

Ender sat on his bed with his desk on his knees. It was private study time, and Ender was doing Free Play. It was a shifting, crazy kind of game in which the school computer kept bringing up new things, building a maze that you could explore. You could go back to events that you liked, for a while; if you left them alone too long, they disappeared and something else took its place.

Sometimes funny things. Sometimes exciting, and he had to be quick to stay alive. He had lots of deaths, but that was OK, games were like that, you died a lot until you got the hang of it.

His figure on the screen had started out as a little boy. For a while it had changed into a bear. Now it was a large mouse, with long and delicate hands. He ran his figure under a lot of large items of furniture. He had played with the cat a lot, but now it was boring-- too easy to dodge, he knew all the furniture.

Not through the mousehole this time, he told himself. I'm sick of the Giant. It's a dumb game and I can't ever win. Whatever I choose is wrong.

But he went through the mousehole anyway, and over the small bridge in the garden. He avoided the ducks and the

divebombing mosquitoes-- he had tried playing with them but they were too easy, and if he played with the ducks too long he turned into a fish, which he didn't like. Being a fish reminded him too much of being frozen in the battleroom, his whole body rigid, waiting for the practice to end so Dap would thaw him. So, as usual, he found himself going up the rolling hills.

The landslides began. At first he had got caught again and again, crushed in an exaggerated blot of gore oozing out from under a rock pile. Now, though, he had mastered the skill of running up the slopes at an angle to avoid the crush, always seeking higher ground.

And, as always, the landslides finally stopped being jumbles of rock. The face of the hill broke open and instead of shale it was white bread, puffy, rising like dough as the crust broke away and fell. It was soft and spongy; his figure moved more slowly. And when he jumped down off the bread, he as standing on a table. Giant loaf of bread behind him; giant stick of butter beside him. And the Giant himself leaning his chin in his hands, looking at him. Ender's figure was about as tall as the Giant's head from chin to brow.

“I think I'll bite your head off,” said the Giant, as he always did.

This time, instead of running away or standing there, Ender walked his figure up to the Giant's face and kicked him in the chin.

The Giant stuck out his tongue and Ender fell to the ground.

“How about a guessing game?” asked the Giant. So it didn't make any difference-- the Giant only played the guessing game. Stupid computer. Millions of possible scenarios in its memory, and the Giant could only play one stupid game.

The Giant, as always, set two huge shot glasses, as tall as Ender's knees, on the table in front of him. As always, the two were filled with different liquids. The computer was good enough that the liquids had never repeated, not that he could remember. This time the one had a thick, creamy looking liquid. The other hissed and foamed.

“One is poison and one is not,” said the Giant. "Guess right and I'll take you into Fairyland.”

Guessing meant sticking his head into one of the glasses to drink. He never guessed right. Sometimes his head was dissolved. Sometimes he caught on fire. Sometimes he fell in

and drowned. Sometimes he fell out, turned green, and rotted away. It was always ghastly, and the Giant always laughed.

Ender knew that whatever he chose he would die. The game was rigged. On the first death, his figure would reappear on the Giant's table, to play again. On the second death, he'd come back to the landslides. Then to the garden bridge. Then to the mousehole. And then, if he still went back to the Giant and played again, and died again, his desk would go dark, “Free Play Over” would march around the desk and Ender would lie back on his bed and tremble until he could finally go to sleep. The game was rigged but still the Giant talked about Fairyland, some stupid childish three-year-old's Fairyland that probably had some stupid Mother Goose or Pac-Man or Peter Pan, it wasn't even worth getting to, but he had to find some way of beating the Giant to get there.

He drank the creamy liquid. Immediately he began to inflate and rise like a balloon. The Giant laughed. He was dead again.

He played again, and this time the liquid set, like concrete, and held his head down while the Giant cut him open along the spine, deboned him like a fish, and began to eat while his arms and legs quivered.

He reappeared at the landslides and decided not to go on. He even let the landslides cover him once. But even though he was sweating and he felt cold, with his next life he went back up the hills till they turned into bread, and stood on the Giant's table as the shot glasses were set before him.

He stared at the two liquids. The one foaming, the other with waves in it like the sea. He tried to guess what kind of death each one held. Probably a fish will come out of the ocean one and eat me. The foamy one will probably asphyxiate me. I hate this game. It isn't fair. It's stupid. It's rotten.

And instead of pushing his face into one of the liquids, he kicked one over, then the other, and dodged the Giant's huge hands as the Giant shouted, “Cheater, cheater!” He jumped at the Giant's face, clambered up his lip and nose, and began to dig in the Giant's eye. The stuff came away like cottage cheese, and as the Giant screamed, Ender's figure burrowed into the eye, climbed right in, burrowed in and in.

The Giant fell over backward, the view shifted as he fell, and when the Giant came to rest on the ground, there were intricate, lacy trees all around. A bat flew up and landed on

the dead Giant's nose. Ender brought his figure up out of the Giant's eye.

“How did you get here?” the bat asked. "Nobody ever comes here.”

Ender could not answer, of course. So he reached down, took a handful of the Giant's eyestuff, and offered it to the bat.

The bat took it and flew off, shouting as it went, "Welcome to Fairyland.”

He had made it. He ought to explore. He ought to climb down from the Giant's face and see what he had finally achieved.

Instead he signed off, put his desk in his locker, stripped off his clothes and pulled his blanket over him. He hadn't meant to kill the Giant. This was supposed to be a game. Not a choice between his own grisly death and an even worse murder. I'm a murderer, even when I play. Peter would be proud of me.

Ender's Game

7

Salamander

“Isn't it nice to know that Ender can do the impossible?”

"The player's deaths have always been sickening. I've always thought the Giant's Drink was the most perverted part of the whole mind game, but going for the eye like that-- this is the one we want to put in command of our fleets?”

"What matters is that he won the game that couldn't be won.”

"I suppose you'll move him now.”

"We were waiting to see how he handled the thing with Bernard. He handled it perfectly.”

"So as soon as he can cope with a situation, you move him to one he can't cope with. Doesn't he get any rest?”

"He'll have a month or two, maybe three, with his launch group. That's really quite a long time in a child's life.”

"Does it ever seem to you that these boys aren't children? I look at what they do, the way they talk, and they don't seem like little kids.”

"They're the most brilliant children in the world, each in his own way.”

"But shouldn't they still act like children? They aren't normal. They act like-- history. Napoleon and Wellington. Caesar and Brutus.”

"We're trying to save the world, not heal the wounded heart. You're too compassionate.”

"General Levy has no pity for anyone. All the videos say so. But don't hurt this boy.”

"Are you joking?”

"I mean, don't hurt him more than you have to.”

Alai sat across from Ender at dinner. "I finally figured out how you sent that message. Using Bernard's name.”

“Me?” asked Ender.

"Come on. who else? It sure wasn't Bernard. And Shen isn't too hot on the computer. And I know it wasn't me. Who

else? Doesn't matter. I figured out how to fake a new student entry. You just created a student named Bernard-blank, B-E-R-N-A-R-D-space, so the computer didn't kick it out as a repeat of another student."

"Sounds like that might work," said Ender.

"OK, OK. It does work. But you did that practically on the first day."

"Or somebody. Maybe Dap did it, to keep Bernard from getting too much control."

"I found something else. I can't do it with your name."

"Oh?"

"Anything with Ender in it gets kicked out. I can't get inside your files at all, either. You made your own security system."

"Maybe."

Alai grinned. "I just got in and trashed somebody's files. He's right behind me on cracking the system. I need protection, Ender. I need your system."

"If I give you my system, you'll know how I do it and you'll get in and trash me."

"You say me?" Alai asked. "I the sweetest friend you got!"

Ender laughed. "I'll setup a system for you."

"Now?"

"Can I finish eating?"

"You never finish eating."

It was true. Ender's tray always had food on it after a meal. Ender looked at the plate and decided he was through. "Let's go then."

When they got to the barracks. Ender squatted down by his bed and said, "Get your desk and bring it over here. I'll show you how." But when Alai brought his desk to Ender's bed, Ender was just sitting there, his lockers still closed.

"What up?" asked Alai.

In answer Ender palmed his locker. "Unauthorized Access Attempt," it said. It didn't open.

"Somebody done a dance on your head, mama," Alai said. "Somebody eated your face."

"You sure you want my security system now?" Ender got up and walked away from his bed.

"Ender," said Alai.

Ender turned around. Alai was holding a little piece of paper.

"What is it?"

Alai looked up at him. "Don't you know? This was on your bed. You must have sat on it."

Ender took it from him.

ENDER WIGGIN
ASSIGNED SALAMANDER ARMY
COMMANDER BONZO MADRID
EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY
CODE GREEN GREEN BROWN
NO POSSESSIONS TRANSFERRED

"You're smart, Ender, but you don't do the battle-room any better than me."

Ender shook his head. It was the stupidest thing he could think of, to promote him now. Nobody got promoted before they were eight years old. Ender wasn't even seven yet. And launches usually moved into the armies together, with most armies getting a new kid at the same time. There were no transfer slips on any of the other beds.

Just when things were finally coming together. Just when Bernard was getting along with everybody, even Ender. Just when Ender was beginning to make a real friend out of Alai. Just when his life was finally getting livable.

Ender reached down to pull Alai up from the bed.

"Salamander Army's in contention, anyway," Alai said.

Ender was so angry at the unfairness of the transfer that tears were coming to his eyes. Mustn't cry, he told himself.

Alai saw the tears but had the grace not to say so. "They're fartheads, Ender, they won't even let you take anything you own."

Ender grinned and didn't cry after all. "Think I should strip and go naked?"

Alai laughed, too.

On impulse Ender hugged him, tight, almost as if he were Valentine. He even thought of Valentine then and wanted to go home. "I don't want to go," he said.

Alai hugged him back. "I understand them, Ender. You are the best of us. Maybe they're in a hurry to teach you everything."

"They don't want to teach me everything," Ender said. "I wanted to learn what it was like to have a friend."

Alai nodded soberly. "Always my friend, always the best of my friends," he said. Then he grinned. "Go slice up the buggers."

“Yeah.” Ender smiled back.

Alai suddenly kissed Ender on the cheek and whispered in his ear. “Salaam.” Then, red faced, he turned away and walked to his own bed at the back of the barracks. Ender guessed that the kiss and the word were somehow forbidden. A suppressed religion, perhaps. Or maybe the word had some private and powerful meaning for Alai alone. Whatever it meant to Alai, Ender knew that it was sacred; that he had uncovered himself for Ender, as once Ender's mother had done when he was very young, before they put the monitor in his neck, and she had put her hands on his head when she thought he was asleep, and prayed over him. Ender had never spoken of that to anyone, not even to Mother, but had kept it as a memory of holiness, of how his mother loved him when she thought that no one, not even he, could see or hear. That was what Alai had given him: a gift so sacred that even Ender could not be allowed to understand what it meant.

After such a thing nothing could be said. Alai reached his bed and turned around to see Ender. Their eyes held for only a moment, locked in understanding. Then Ender left.

There would be no green green brown in this part of the school; he would have to pick up the colors in one of the public areas. The others would be finished with dinner very soon; he didn't want to go near the mess hall. The game room would be nearly empty.

None of the games appealed to him, the way he felt now. So he went to the bank of public desks at the back of the room and signed on to his own private game. He went quickly to Fairyland. The Giant was dead when he arrived now; he had to climb carefully down the table, jump to the leg of the Giant's overturned chair, and then make the drop to the ground. For a while there had been rats gnawing at the Giant's body, but Ender had killed one with a pin from the Giant's ragged shirt, and they had left him alone after that.

The Giant's corpse had essentially finished its decay. What could be torn by the small scavengers was torn; the maggots had done their work on the organs, now it was a desiccated mummy, hollowed-out, teeth in a rigid grin, eyes empty, fingers curled. Ender remembered burrowing through the eye when it had been alive and malicious and intelligent. Angry and frustrated as he was, Ender wished to do such murder again. But the Giant had become part of the landscape now, and so there could be no rage against him.

Ender had always gone over the bridge to the castle of the Queen of Hearts, where there were games enough for him; but none of those appealed to him now. He went around the giant's corpse and followed the brook upstream, to where it emerged from the forest. There was a playground there, slides and monkeybars, teeter-totters and merry-go-rounds, with a dozen children laughing as they played. Ender came and found that in the game he had become a child, though usually his figure in the games was adult. In fact, he was smaller than the other children.

He got in line for the slide. The other children ignored him. He climbed up to the top, watched the boy before him whirl down the long spiral to the ground. Then he sat and began to slide.

He had not slid for a moment when he fell right through the slide and landed on the ground under the ladder. The slide would not hold him.

Neither would the monkey bars. He could climb a ways, but then at random a bar seemed to be insubstantial and he fell. He could sit on the see-saw until he rose to the apex; then he fell. When the merry-go-round went fast, he could not hold onto any of the bars, and centrifugal force hurled him off.

And the other children: their laughter was raucous, offensive. They circled around him and pointed and laughed for many seconds before they went back to their play.

Ender wanted to hit them, to throw them in the brook. Instead he walked into the forest. He found a path, which soon became an ancient brick road, much overgrown with weeds but still usable. There were hints of possible games off to either side, but Ender followed none of them. He wanted to see where the path led.

It led to a clearing, with a well in the middle, and a sign that said, “Drink, traveler.” Ender went forward and looked at the well. Almost at once, he heard a snarl. Out of the woods emerged a dozen slavering wolves with human faces. Ender recognized them-- they were the children from the playground. Only now their teeth could tear; Ender, weaponless, was quickly devoured.

His next figure appeared, as usual, in the same spot, and was eaten again, though Ender tried to climb down into the well.

The next appearance, though, was at the playground. Again the children laughed at him. Laugh all you like, Ender

thought. I know what you are. He pushed one of them. She followed him, angry. Ender led her up the slide. Of course he fell through; but this time, following so closely behind him, she also fell through. When she hit the ground, she turned into a wolf and lay there, dead or stunned.

One by one Ender led each of the others into a trap. But before he had finished off the last of them, the wolves began reviving, and were no longer children. Ender was torn apart again.

This time, shaking and sweating, Ender found his figure revived on the Giant's table. I should quit, he told himself. I should go to my new army.

But instead he made his figure drop down from the table and walk around the Giant's body to the playground.

This time, as soon as the child hit the ground and turned into a wolf, Ender dragged the body to the brook and pulled it in. Each time, the body sizzled as though the water were acid; the wolf was consumed, and a dark cloud of smoke arose and drifted away. The children were easily dispatched, though they began following him in twos and threes at the end. Ender found no wolves waiting for him in the clearing, and he lowered himself into the well on the bucket rope.

The light in the cavern was dim, but he could see piles of jewels. He passed them by, noting that, behind him, eyes glinted among the gems. A table covered with food did not interest him. He passed through a group of cages hanging from the ceiling of the cave, each containing some exotic, friendly-looking creature. I'll play with you later, Ender thought. At last he came to a door, with these words in glowing emeralds:

THE END OF THE WORLD

He did not hesitate. He opened the door and stepped through.

He stood on a small ledge, high on a cliff overlooking a terrain of bright and deep green forest with dashes of autumn color and patches here and there of cleared land, with oxdrawn plows and small villages, a castle on a rise in the distance, and clouds riding currents of air below him. Above him, the sky was the ceiling of a vast cavern, with crystals dangling in bright stalactites.

The door closed behind him. Ender studied the scene intently. With the beauty of it, he cared less for survival than

usual. He cared little, at the moment, what the game of this place might be. He had found it, and seeing it was its own reward. And so, with no thought of consequences, he jumped from the ledge.

Now he plummeted downward toward a rolling river and savage rocks; but a cloud came between him and the ground as he fell, and caught him, and carried him away.

It took him to the tower of the castle, and through the open window, bearing him in. There it left him, in a room with no apparent door in floor or ceiling, and windows looking out over a certainly fatal fall.

A moment ago he had thrown himself from a ledge carelessly; this time he hesitated.

The small rug before the fire unraveled itself into a long, slender serpent with wicked teeth.

“I am your only escape,” it said. "Death is your only escape.

Ender looked around the room for a weapon, when suddenly the screen went dark. Words flashed around the rim of the desk.

REPORT TO COMMANDER IMMEDIATELY.
YOU ARE LATE.
GREEN GREEN BROWN.

Furious, Ender snapped off the desk and went to the color wall, where he found the ribbon of green green brown, touched it, and followed it as it lit up before him. The dark green, light green, and brown of the ribbon reminded him of the early autumn kingdom he had found in the game. I must go back there, he told himself. The serpent is a long thread; I can let myself down from the tower and find my way through that place. Perhaps it's called the end of the world because it's the end of the games, because I can go to one of the villages and become one of the little boys working and playing there, with nothing to kill and nothing to kill me, just living there.

As he thought of it, though, he could not imagine what “just living” might actually be. He had never done it in his life. But he wanted to do it anyway.

Armies were larger than launch groups, and the army

barracks room was larger, too. It was long and narrow, with bunks on both sides; so long, in fact, that you could see the curvature of the floor as the far end bent upward, part of the wheel of the Battle School.

Ender stood at the door. A few boys near the door glanced at him, but they were older, and it seemed as though they hadn't even seen him. They went on with their conversations, lying and leaning on bunks. They were discussing battles, of course; the older boys always did. They were all much larger than Ender. The ten- and eleven-year-olds towered over him; even the youngest were eight, and Ender was not large for his age.

He tried to see which of the boys was the commander, but most were somewhere between battle dress and what the soldiers always called their sleep uniform-- skin from head to toe. Many of them had desks out, but few were studying.

Ender stepped into the room. The moment he did, he was noticed.

“What do you want?” demanded the boy who had the upper bunk by the door. He was the largest of them. Ender had noticed him before, a young giant who had whiskers growing raggedly on his chin. "You're not a Salamander.”

“I'm supposed to be, I think,” Ender said. “Green green brown, right? I was transferred.” He showed the boy, obviously the doorguard, his paper.

The doorguard reached for it. Ender withdrew it just out of reach. "I'm supposed to give it to Bonzo Madrid.”

Now another boy joined the conversation, a smaller boy, but still larger than Ender, "Not bahn-zoe, pisshead. Bone-So. The name's Spanish. Bonzo Madrid. Aqui nosotros hablamos español, Señor Gran Fedor.”

“You must be Bonzo, then?” Ender asked, pronouncing the name correctly.

"No, just a brilliant and talented polyglot. Petra Arkanian. The only girl in Salamander Army. With more balls than anybody else in the room.”

“Mother Petra she talking?” said one of the boys. "She talking, she talking.”

Another one chimed in. "Shit talking ... shit talking, shit talking!”

Quite a few laughed.

“Just between you and me,” Petra said, "if they gave the Battle School an enema, they'd stick it in at green green brown.”

Ender despaired. He already had nothing going for him: grossly undertrained, small, inexperienced, doomed to be resented for early advancement. And now, by chance, he had made exactly the wrong friend. An outcast in Salamander Army, and she had just linked him with her in the minds of the rest of the army. A good day's work. For a moment, as Ender looked around at the laughing, jeering faces, he imagined their bodies covered with hair, their teeth pointed for tearing. Am I the only human being in this place? Are all the others animals, waiting only to devour?

Then he remembered Alai. In every army, surely, there was at least one worth knowing.

Suddenly, though no one said to be quiet, the laughter stopped and the group fell silent. Ender turned to the door. A boy stood there, tall and dark and slender, with beautiful black eyes and slender lips that hinted at refinement. I would follow such beauty, said something inside Ender. I would see as those eyes see.

“Who are you?” asked the boy quietly.

“Ender Wiggin, sir,” Ender said. “Reassigned from launch to Salamander Army.” He held out the orders.

The boy took the paper in a swift, sure movement, without touching Ender's hand. “How old are you, Wiggin?” he asked.

"Almost seven.”

Still quietly, he said, "I asked how old you are, not how old you almost are.”

"I am six years, nine months, and twelve days old.”

"How long have you been working in the battleroom?”

"A few months, now. My aim is better.”

"Any training in battle maneuvers? Have you ever been part of a toon? Have you ever carried out a joint exercise?”

Ender had never heard of such things. He shook his head.

Madrid looked at him steadily. "I see. As you will quickly learn, the officers in command of this school, most notably Major Anderson, who runs the game, are fond of playing tricks. Salamander Army is just beginning to emerge from indecent obscurity. We have won twelve of our last twenty games. We have surprised Rat and Scorpion and Hound, and we are ready to play for leadership in the game. So of course, of course I am given such a useless, untrained, hopeless specimen of underdevelopment as yourself.”

Petra said, quietly, "He isn't glad to meet you.”

“Shut up, Arkanian,” Madrid said. "To one trial we now add another. But whatever obstacles our officers choose to fling in our path, we are still--”

“Salamander!” cried the soldiers, in one voice. Instinctively, Ender's perception of these events changed. It was a pattern, a ritual. Madrid was not trying to hurt him, merely taking control of a surprising event and using it to strengthen his control of his army.

"We are the fire that will consume them, belly and bowel, head and heart, many flames of us, but one fire.”

“Salamander!” they cried again.

"Even this one will not weaken us.”

For a moment, Ender allowed himself to hope. “I'll work hard and learn quickly,” he said.

“I didn't give you permission to speak,” Madrid answered. "I intend to trade you away as quickly as I can. I'll probably have to give up someone valuable along with you, but as small as you are you are worse than useless. One more frozen, inevitably, in every battle, that's all you are, and we're now at a point where every frozen soldier makes a difference in the standings. Nothing personal, Wiggin, but I'm sure you can get your training at someone else's expense.”

“He's all heart,” Petra said.

Madrid stepped closer to the girl and slapped her across the face with the back of his hand. It made little sound, for only his fingernails had hit her. But there were bright red marks, four of them, on her cheek, and little pricks of blood marked where the tips of his fingernails had struck.

"Here are your instructions, Wiggin. I expect that it is the last time I'll need to speak to you. You will stay out of the way when we're training in the battleroom. You have to be there, of course, but you will not belong to any toon and you will not take part in any maneuvers. When we're called to battle, you will dress quickly and present yourself at the gate with everyone else. But you will not pass through the gate until four full minutes after the beginning of the game, and then you will remain at the gate, with your weapon undrawn and unfired, until such time as the game ends.”

Ender nodded. So he was to be a nothing. He hoped the trade happened soon.

He also noticed that Petra did not so much as cry out in pain, or touch her cheek, though one spot of blood had beaded and run, making a streak down to her jaw. Outcast she may be, but since Bonzo Madrid was not going to be

Ender's friend, no matter what, he might as well make friends with Petra.

He was assigned a bunk at the far end of the room. The upper bunk, so that when he lay on his bed he couldn't even seen the door; the curve of the ceiling blocked it. There were other boys near him, tired-looking boys, sullen, the ones least valued. They had nothing of welcome to say to Ender.

Ender tried to palm his locker open, but nothing happened. Then he realized the lockers were not secured. All four of them had rings on them, to pull them open. Nothing would be private, then, now that he was in an army.

There was a uniform in the locker. Not the pale green of the Launchies, but the orange-trimmed dark green uniform of Salamander Army. It did not fit well. But then, they had probably never had to provide such a uniform for a boy so young.

He was starting to take it off when he noticed Petra walking down the aisle toward his bed. He slid off the bunk and stood on the floor to greet her.

“Relax,” she said. "I'm not an officer.”

"You're a toon leader, aren't you?”

Someone nearby snickered.

"Whatever gave you that idea, Wiggin?”

"You have a bunk in the front.”

“I bunk in the front because I'm the best sharpshooter in Salamander Army, and because Bonzo is afraid I'll start a revolution if the toon leaders don't keep an eye on me. As if I could start anything with boys like these.” She indicated the sullen-faced boys on the nearby bunks.

What was she trying to do, make it worse than it already was?

“Everybody's better than I am,” Ender said, trying to dissociate himself from her contempt for the boys who would, after all, be his near bunkmates.

“I'm a girl,” she said, "and you're a pissant of a six-year-old. We have so much in common, why don't we be friends?”

“I won't do your deskwork for you,” he said.

In a moment she realized it was a joke. “Ha,” she said. "It's all so military, when you're in the game. School isn't like it is for Launchies. Histories and strategy and tactics and buggers and math and stars, things you'll need as a pilot or a commander. You'll see.”

“So you're my friend. Do I get a prize?” Ender asked. He was imitating her swaggering way of speaking, as if she cared

about nothing.

“Bonzo isn't going to let you practice. He's going to make you take your desk to the battleroom and study. He's right, in a way-- he doesn't want a totally untrained little kid start screwing up his precision maneuvers.” She lapsed into giria, the slangy talk that imitated the pidgin English of uneducated people. "Bonzo, he pre-cise. He so careful, he piss on a plate and never splash.”

Ender grinned.

"The battleroom is open all the time. If you want, I'll take you in the off hours and show you some of the things I know, I'm not a great soldier, but I'm pretty good, and I sure know more than you.”

“If you want,” Ender said.

"Starting tomorrow morning after breakfast.”

"What if somebody's using the room? We always went right after breakfast, in my launch.”

"No problem. There are really nine battlerooms.”

"I never heard of any others.”

"They all have the same entrance. The whole center of the battle school, the hub of the wheel, is battlerooms. They don't rotate with the rest of the station. That's how they do the nullg, the no-gravity-- it just holds still. No spin, no down. But they can set it up so that any one of the rooms is at the battleroom entrance corridor that we all use. Once you're inside, they move it along and another battleroom's in position.”

"Oh.”

"Like I said. Right after breakfast.”

“Right,” Ender said.

She started to walk away.

“Petra,” he said.

She turned back.

"Thanks.”

She said nothing, just turned around again and walked down the aisle.

Ender climbed back up on his bunk and finished taking off his uniform. He lay naked on the bed, doodling with his new desk, trying to decide if they had done anything to his access codes. Sure enough, they had wiped out his security system. He couldn't own anything here, not even his desk.

The lights dimmed a little. Getting toward bedtime. Ender didn't know which bathroom to use.

“Go left out of the door,” said the boy on the next bunk.

"We share it with Rat, Condor, and Squirrel."

Ender thanked him and started to walk on past.

"Hey," said the boy. "You can't go like that. Uniforms at all times out of this room."

"Even going to the toilet?"

"Especially. And you're forbidden to speak to anyone from any other army. At meals or in the toilet. You can get away with it sometimes in the game room, and of course whenever a teacher tells you to, but if Bonzo catch you, you dead, eh?"

"Thanks."

"And, uh, Bonzo get mad if you skin by Petra."

"She was naked when I came in, wasn't she?"

"She do what she like, but you keep you clothes on. Bonzo's orders."

That was stupid. Petra still looked like a boy, it was a stupid rule. It set her apart, made her different, split the army. Stupid stupid. How did Bonzo get to be a commander, if he didn't know better than that? Alai would be a better commander than Bonzo. He knew how to bring a group together.

I know how to bring a group together, too, thought Ender. Maybe I'll be commander someday.

In the bathroom, he was washing his hands when somebody spoke to him. "Hey, they putting babies in Salamander uniforms now?"

Ender didn't answer just dried off his hands.

"Hey, look! Salamander's getting babies now! Look at this! He could walk between my legs without touching my balls!"

"Cause you got none, Dink, that's why," somebody answered.

As Ender left the room, he heard somebody else say, "It's Wiggin. You know, the smartass from the game room."

He walked down the corridor smiling. He may be short, but they knew his name. From the game room, of course, so it meant nothing. But they'd see. He'd be a good soldier, too. They'd all know his name soon enough. Not in Salamander Army, maybe, but soon enough.

Petra was waiting in the corridor that led to the battleroom. "Wait a minute," she said to Ender. "Rabbit Army

just went in, and it takes a few minutes to change to the next battleroom."

Ender sat down beside her. "There's more to the battleroom than just switching from one to the next," he said. "For instance, why is there gravity in the corridor outside the room, just before we go in?"

Petra closed her eyes. "And if the battlerooms are really free-floating, what happens when one is connected? Why doesn't it start to move with the rotation of the school?"

Ender nodded.

"These are the mysteries," Petra said in a deep whisper. "Do not pry into them. Terrible things happened to the last soldier who tried. He was discovered hanging by his feet from the ceiling of the bathroom, with his head stuffed in the toilet."

"So I'm not the first person to ask the question."

"You remember this, little boy." When she said little boy it sounded friendly, not contemptuous. "They never tell you any more truth than they have to. But any kid with brains knows that there've been some changes in science since the days of old Mazer Rackham and the Victorious Fleet. Obviously we can now control gravity. Turn it on and off, change the direction, maybe reflect it-- I've thought of lots of neat things you could do with gravity weapons and gravity drives on starships. And think how starships could move near planets. Maybe tear big chunks out of them by reflecting the planet's own gravity back on itself, only from another direction, and focused down to a smaller point. But they say nothing."

Ender understood more than she said. Manipulation of gravity was one thing; deception by the officers was another; but the most important message was this: the adults are the enemy, not the other armies. They do not tell us the truth.

"Come, little boy," she said. "The battleroom is ready. Petra's hands are steady. The enemy is deadly." She giggled. "Petra the poet, they call me."

"They also say you're crazy as a loon."

"Better believe it, baby butt." She had ten target balls in a bag. Ender held onto her suit with one hand and the wall with the other, to steady her as she threw them, hard, in different directions. In the null gravity, they bounced every which way. "Let go of me," she said. She shoved off, spinning deliberately; with a few deft hand moves she steadied herself, and began aiming carefully at ball after ball. When she shot

one, its glow changed from white to red. Ender knew that the color change lasted less than two minutes. Only one ball had changed back to white when she got the last one.

She rebounded accurately from a wall and came at high speed back to Ender. He caught her and held her against her own rebound, one of the first techniques they had taught him as a Launchy.

“You're good,” he said.

"None better. And you're going to learn how to do it.”

Petra taught him to hold his arm straight, to aim with the whole arm. "Something most soldiers don't realize is that the farther away your target is, the longer you have to hold the beam within about a two-centimeter circle. It's the difference between a tenth of a second and a half a second, but in battle that's a long time. A lot of soldiers think they missed when they were right on target, but they moved away too fast. So you can't use your gun like a sword, swish swish slice-em-in-half. You got to aim.”

She used the ballcaller to bring the targets back, then launched them slowly, one by one. Ender fired at them. He missed every one.

“Good,” she said. "You don't have any bad habits.”

“I don't have any good ones, either,” he pointed out.

"I give you those.”

They didn't accomplish much that first morning. Mostly talk. How to think while you were aiming. You've got to hold your own motion and your enemy's motion in your mind at the same time. You've got to hold your arm straight out and aim with your body, so in case your arm is frozen you can still shoot. Learn where your trigger actually fires and ride the edge, so you don't have to pull so far each time you fire. Relax your body, don't tense up; it makes you tremble.

It was the only practice Ender got that day. During the army's drills in the afternoon, Ender was ordered to bring his desk and do his schoolwork, sitting in a corner of the room. Bonzo had to have all his soldiers in the battleroom, but he didn't have to use them.

Ender did not do his schoolwork, however. If he couldn't have drill as a soldier, he could study Bonzo as a tactician. Salamander Army was divided into the standard four toons of ten soldiers each. Some commanders set up their toons so that A toon consisted of the best soldiers, and D toon had the worst. Bonzo had mixed them, so that each consisted of good soldiers and weaker ones.

Except that B toon had only nine boys. Ender wondered who had been transferred to make room for him. It soon became plain that the leader of toon B was new. No wonder Bonzo was so disgusted-- he had lost a toon leader to get Ender.

And Bonzo was right about another thing. Ender was not ready.

All the practice time was spent working on maneuvers. Toons that couldn't see each other practiced performing precision operations together with exact timing; toons practiced using each other to make sudden changes of direction without losing formation. All these soldiers took for granted skills that Ender didn't have. The ability to make a soft landing and absorb most of the shock. Accurate flight. Course adjustment using the frozen soldiers floating randomly through the room. Rolls, spins, dodges. Sliding along the walls-- a very difficult maneuver and yet one of the most valuable, since the enemy couldn't get behind you.

Even as Ender learned how much he did not know, he also saw things that he could improve on. The well-rehearsed formations were a mistake. It allowed the soldiers to obey shouted orders instantly, but it also meant they were predictable. Also, the individual soldiers were given little initiative. Once a pattern was set, they were to follow it through. There was no room for adjustment to what the enemy did against the formation. Ender studied Bonzo's formations like an enemy commander would, noting ways to disrupt the formation.

During free play that night, Ender asked Petra to practice with him.

“No,” she said. “I want to be a commander someday, so I've got to play the game room.” It was a common belief that the teachers monitored the games and spotted potential commanders there. Ender doubted it, though. Toon leaders had a better chance to show what they might do as commanders than any video player.

But he didn't argue with Petra. The after-breakfast practice was generous enough. Still, he had to practice. And he couldn't practice alone, except a few of the basic skills. Most of the hard things required partners or teams. If only he still had Alai or Shen to practice with.

Well, why shouldn't he practice with them? He had never heard of a soldier practicing with Launchies, but there was no rule against it. It just wasn't done; Launchies were

held in too much contempt. Well, Ender was still being treated like a Launchy anyway. He needed someone to practice with, and in return he could help them learn some of the things he saw the older boys doing.

"Hey, the great soldier returns!" said Bernard. Ender stood in the doorway of his old barracks. He'd only been away for a day, but already it seemed like an alien place, and the others of his launch group were strangers. Almost he turned around and left. But there was Alai, who had made their friendship sacred. Alai was not a stranger.

Ender made no effort to conceal how he was treated in Salamander Army. "And they're right. I'm about as useful as a sneeze in a spacesuit." Alai laughed, and other Launchies started to gather around. Ender proposed his bargain. Free play, every day, working hard in the battleroom, under Ender's direction. They would learn things from the armies, from the battles Ender would see; he would get the practice he needed in developing soldier skills. "We'll get ready together."

A lot of boys wanted to come, too. "Sure," Ender said. "If you're coming to work. If you're just farting around, you're out. I don't have any time to waste."

They didn't waste any time. Ender was clumsy, trying to describe what he had seen, working out ways to do it. But by the time free play ended, they had learned some things. They were tired, but they were getting the knack of a few techniques.

"Where were you?" asked Bonzo.

Ender stood stiffly by his commander's bunk. "Practicing in a battleroom."

"I hear you had some of your old Launchy group with you."

"I couldn't practice alone."

"I won't have any soldiers in Salamander Army hanging around with Launchies. You're a soldier now."

Ender regarded him in silence.

"Did you hear me, Wiggin?"

"Yes, sir."

"No more practicing with those little farts."

"May I speak to you privately?" asked Ender.

It was a request that commanders were required to allow. Bonzo's face went angry, and he led Ender out into the corridor. "Listen, Wiggin, I don't want you, I'm trying to get rid of you, but don't give me any problems or I'll paste you to

the wall."

A good commander, thought Ender, doesn't have to make stupid threats.

Bonzo grew annoyed at Ender's silence. "Look, you asked me to come out here, now talk."

"Sir, you were correct not to place me in a toon. I don't know how to do anything."

"I don't need you to tell me when I'm correct."

"But I'm going to become a good soldier. I won't screw up your regular drill, but I'm going to practice, and I'm going to practice with the only people who will practice with me, and that's my Launchies."

"You'll do what I tell you, you little bastard."

"That's right, sir. I'll follow all the orders that you're authorized to give. But free play is free. No assignments can be given. None. By anyone.

He could see Bonzo's anger growing hot. Hot anger was bad. Ender's anger was cold, and he could use it. Bonzo's was hot, and so it used him.

"Sir, I've got my own career to think of. I won't interfere in your training and your battles, but I've got to learn sometime. I didn't ask to be put into your army, you're trying to trade me as soon as you can. But nobody will take me if I don't know anything, will they? Let me learn something, and then you can get rid of me all the sooner and get a soldier you can really use."

Bonzo was not such a fool that anger kept him from recognizing good sense when he heard it. Still, he couldn't let go of his anger immediately.

"While you're in Salamander Army, you'll obey me."

"If you try to control my free play, I can get you iced."

It probably wasn't true. But it was possible. Certainly if Ender made a fuss about it, interfering with free play could conceivably get Bonzo removed from command. Also, there was the fact that the officers obviously saw something in Ender, since they had promoted him. Maybe Ender did have influence enough with the teachers to ice somebody. "Bastard," said Bonzo.

"It isn't my fault you gave me that order in front of everybody," Ender said. "But if you want, I'll pretend you won this argument. Then tomorrow you can tell me you changed your mind."

"I don't need you to tell me what to do."

"I don't want the other guys to think you backed down.

You wouldn't be able to command as well."

Bonzo hated him for it, for the kindness. It was as if Ender were granting him his command as a favor. Galling, and yet he had no choice. No choice about anything. It didn't occur to Bonzo that it was his own fault, for giving Ender an unreasonable order. He only knew that Ender had beaten him, and then rubbed his nose in it by being magnanimous.

"I'll have your ass someday," Bonzo said.

"Probably," said Ender. The lights out buzzer sounded. Ender walked back into the room, looking dejected. Beaten. Angry. The other boy's drew the obvious conclusion.

And in the morning, as Ender was leaving for breakfast, Bonzo stopped him and spoke loudly. "I changed my mind, pinprick. Maybe by practicing with your Launchies you'll learn something, and I can trade you easier. Anything to get rid of you faster."

"Thank you, sir," Ender said.

"Anything," whispered Bonzo. "I hope you're iced." Ender smiled gratefully and left the room. After breakfast he practiced again with Petra. All afternoon he watched Bonzo drill and figured out ways to destroy his army. During free play he and Alai and the others worked themselves to exhaustion. I can do this, thought Ender as he lay in his bed, his muscles throbbing, unknotting themselves. I can handle it.

Salamander Army had a battle four days later. Ender followed behind the real soldiers as they jogged along the corridors to the battleroom. There were two ribbons along the walls, the green green brown of Salamander and the black white black of Condor. When they came to the place where the battleroom had always been, the corridor split instead, with green green brown heading to the left and black white black to the right. Around another turn to the right, and the army stopped in front of a blank wall.

The toons formed up in silence. Ender stayed behind them all. Bonzo was giving his instructions. "A take the handles and go up. B left, C right, D down." He saw that the toons were oriented to follow instructions, then added, "And you, pinprick, wait four minutes, then come just inside the door. Don't even take your gun off your suit."

Ender nodded. Suddenly the wall behind Bonzo became

transparent. Not a wall at all, then, but a forcefield. The battleroom was different, too. Huge brown boxes were suspended in midair, partially obstructing the view. So these were the obstacles that the soldiers called stars. They were distributed seemingly at random. Bonzo seemed not to care where they were.

Apparently the soldiers already knew how to handle the stars.

But it soon became clear to Ender, as he sat and watched the battle from the corridor, that they did not know how to handle the stars. They did know how to softland on one and use it for cover, the tactics of assaulting the enemy's position on a star. They showed no sense at all of which stars mattered. They persisted in assaulting stars that could have been bypassed by wall-sliding to a more advanced position.

The other commander was taking advantage of Bonzo's neglect of strategy. Condor Army forced the Salamanders into costly assaults. Fewer and fewer Salamanders were unfrozen for the attack on the next star. It was clear, after only five or six minutes, that Salamander Army could not defeat the enemy by attacking.

Ender stepped through the gate. He drifted slightly downward. The battlerooms he had practiced in always had their doors at floor level. For real battles, however, the door was set in the middle of the wall, as far from the floor as from the ceiling.

Abruptly he felt himself reorient, as he had in the shuttle. What had been down was now up, and now sideways. In null-g, there was no reason to stay oriented the way he had been in the corridor. It was impossible to tell, looking at the perfectly square doors, which way had been up. And it didn't matter. For now Ender had found the orientation that made sense. The enemy's gate was down. The object of the game was to fall toward the enemy's home.

Ender made the motions that oriented himself in his new direction. Instead of being spread out, his whole body presented to the enemy, now Ender's legs pointed toward them. He was a much smaller target.

Someone saw him. He was, after all, drifting aimlessly in the open. Instinctively he pulled his legs up under him. At that moment he was flashed and the legs of his suit froze in position. His arms remained unfrozen, for without a direct body hit, only the limbs that were shot froze up. It occurred to Ender that if he had not been presenting his legs to the

enemy, it would have been his body they hit. He would have been immobilized.

Since Bonzo had ordered him not to draw his weapon, Ender continued to drift, not moving his head or arms, as if they had been frozen, too. The enemy ignored him and concentrated their fire on the soldiers who were firing at them. It was a bitter battle. Outnumbered now, Salamander Army gave ground stubbornly. The battle disintegrated into a dozen individual shootouts. Bonzo's discipline paid off now, for each Salamander that froze took at least one enemy with him. No one ran or panicked, everyone remained calm and aimed carefully.

Petra was especially deadly. Condor Army noticed it and took great effort to freeze her. They froze her shooting arm first, and her stream of curses was only interrupted when they froze her completely and the helmet clamped down on her jaw. In a few minutes it was over. Salamander Army offered no more resistance.

Ender noted with pleasure that Condor could only muster the minimal five soldiers necessary to open the gate to victory. Four of them touched their helmets to the lighted spots at the four corners of Salamander's door, while the fifth passed through the forcefield. That ended the game. The lights came back on to their full brightness, and Anderson came out of the teacher door.

I could have drawn my gun, thought Ender, as the enemy approached the door. l could have drawn my gun and shot just one of them, and they would have been too few. The game would have been a draw. Without four men to touch the four corners and a fifth man to pass through the gate, Condor would have had no victory. Bonzo, you ass, I could have saved you from this defeat. Maybe even turned it to victory, since they were sitting there, easy targets, and they wouldn't have known at first where the shots were coming from. I'm a good enough shot for that.

But orders were orders, and Ender had promised to obey. He did get some satisfaction out of the fact that on the official tally Salamander Army recorded, not the expected forty-one disabled or eliminated, but rather forty eliminated and one damaged. Bonzo couldn't understand it, until he consulted Anderson's book and realized who it was. Damaged, Bonzo, thought Ender. I could still shoot.

He expected Bonzo to come to him and say, “Next time, when it's like that, you can shoot.” But Bonzo didn't say

anything to him at all until the next morning after breakfast. Of course, Bonzo ate in the commanders mess, but Ender was pretty sure the odd score would cause as much stir there as it did in the soldiers dining hall. In every other game that wasn't a draw, every member of the losing team was either eliminated-- totally frozen-- or disabled, which meant they had some body parts still unfrozen, but were unable to shoot or inflict damage on the enemy. Salamander was the only losing army with one man in the Damaged but Active category.

Ender volunteered no explanation, but the other members of Salamander Army let it be known why it had happened. And when other boys asked him why he hadn't disobeyed orders and fired, he calmly answered, "I obey orders."

After breakfast, Bonzo looked for him. "The order still stands," he said, "and don't you forget it."

It will cost you, you fool. I may not be a good soldier, but I can still help and there's no reason you shouldn't let me.

Ender said nothing.

An interesting side effect of the battle was that Ender emerged at the top of the soldier efficiency list. Since he hadn't fired a shot, he had a perfect record on shooting-- no misses at all. And since he had never been eliminated or disabled, his percentage there was excellent. No one else came close. It made a lot of boys laugh, and others were angry, but on the prized efficiency list, Ender was now the leader.

He kept sitting out the army practice sessions, and kept working hard on his own, with Petra in the mornings and his friends at night. More Launchies were joining them now, not on a lark but because they could see results-- they were getting better and better. Ender and Alai stayed ahead of them, though. In part, it was because Alai kept trying new things, which forced Ender to think of new tactics to cope with them. In part it was because they kept making stupid mistakes, which suggested things to do that no self-respecting, well-trained soldier would even have tried. Many of the things they attempted turned out to be useless. But it was always fun, always exciting, and enough things worked that they knew it was helping them. Evening was the best time of the day.

The next two battles were easy Salamander victories; Ender came in after five minutes and remained untouched by

the defeated enemy. Ender began to realize that Condor Army, which had beaten them, was unusually good; Salamander, weak as Bonzo's grasp of strategy might be, was one of the better teams, climbing steadily in the ratings, clawing for fourth place with Rat Army.

Ender turned seven. They weren't much for dates and calendars at the Battle School, but Ender had found out how to bring up the date on his desk, and he noticed has birthday. The school noticed it, too: they took his measurements and issued him a new Salamander uniform and a new flash suit for the battleroom. He went back to the barracks with the new clothing on. It felt strange and loose, like his skin no longer fit properly.

He wanted to stop at Petra's bunk and tell her about his home, about what his birthdays were usually like, just tell her it was his birthday so she'd say something about it being a happy one. But nobody told birthdays. It was childish. It was what landsiders did. Cakes and silly customs. Valentine baked him his cake on his sixth birthday. It fell and it was terrible. Nobody knew how to cook anymore; it was the kind of crazy thing Valentine would do. Everybody teased Valentine about it, but Ender saved a little bit of it in his cupboard. Then they took out his monitor and he left and for all he knew, it was still there, a little piece of greasy yellow dust. Nobody talked about home, not among the soldiers; there had been no life before Battle School. Nobody got letters, and nobody wrote any. Everybody pretended that they didn't care.

But I do care, thought Ender. The only reason I'm here is so that a bugger won't shoot out Valentine's eye, won't blast her head open like the soldiers in the videos of the first battles with the buggers. Won't split her head with a beam so hot that her brains burst the skull and spill out like rising bread dough, the way it happens in my worst nightmares, in my worst nights, when I wake up trembling but silent, must keep silent or they'll hear that I miss my family. I want to go home.

It was better in the morning. Home was merely a dull ache in the back of his memory. A tiredness in his eyes. That morning Bonzo came in as they were dressing. “Flash suits!” he called. It was a battle. Ender's fourth game.

The enemy was Leopard Army. It would be easy. Leopard was new, and it was always in the bottom quarter in the standings. It had been organized only six months ago,

with Pol Slattery as its commander. Ender put on his new battle suit and got into line; Bonzo pulled him roughly out of line and made him march at the end. You didn't need to do that, Ender said silently. You could have let me stay in line.

Ender watched from the corridor. Pol Slattery was young, but he was sharp, he had some new ideas. He kept his soldiers moving, darting from star to star, wallsliding to get behind and above the stolid Salamanders. Ender smiled. Bonzo was hopelessly confused, and so were his men. Leopard seemed to have men in every direction. However, the battle was not as lopsided as it seemed. Ender noticed that Leopard was losing a lot of men, too-- their reckless tactics exposed them too much. What mattered, however, was that Salamander felt defeated. They had surrendered the initiative completely. Though they were still fairly evenly matched with the enemy, they huddled together like the last survivors of a massacre, as if they hoped the enemy would overlook them in the carnage.

Ender slipped slowly through the gate, oriented himself so the enemy's gate was down, and drifted slowly eastward to a corner where he wouldn’t be noticed. He even fired at his own legs, to hold them in the kneeling position that offered him the best protection. He looked to any casual glance like another frozen soldier who had drifted helplessly out of the battle.

With Salamander Army waiting abjectly for destruction, Leopard obligingly destroyed them. They had nine boys left when Salamander finally stopped firing. They formed up and started to open the Salamander gate.

Ender aimed carefully with a straight arm, as Petra had taught him. Before anyone knew what was happening, he froze three of the soldiers who were about to press their helmets against the lighted corners of the door. Then some of the others spotted him and fired-- but at first they hit only his already frozen legs. It gave him time to get the last two men at the gate. Leopard had only four men left unfrozen when Ender was finally hit in the arm and disabled. The game was a draw, and they never had hit him in the body.

Pol Slattery was furious, but there had been nothing unfair about it. Everyone in Leopard Army assumed that it had been a strategy of Bonzo's, to leave a man till the last minute. It didn't occur to them that little Ender had fired against orders. But Salamander Army knew. Bonzo knew, and Ender could see from the way the commander looked at him

that Bonzo hated him for rescuing him from total defeat. I don't care, Ender told himself. It will just make me easier to trade away, and in the meantime you won't drop so far in the standings. You trade me. I've learned all I'm ever going to learn from you. How to fail with style, that's all you know, Bonzo.

What have I learned so far? Ender listed things in his mind as he undressed by his bunk. The enemy's gate is down. Use my legs as a shield in battle. A small reserve, held back until the end of the game, can be decisive. And soldiers can sometimes make decisions that are smarter than the orders they've been given.

Naked, he was about to climb into bed when Bonzo came toward him, his face hard and set. I have seen Peter like this, thought Ender, silent with murder in his eye. But Bonzo is not Peter. Bonzo has more fear.

"Wiggin, I finally traded you. I was able to persuade Rat Army that your incredible place on the efficiency list is more than an accident. You go over there tomorrow."

"Thank you, sir," Ender said.

Perhaps he sounded too grateful. Suddenly Bonzo swung at him, caught his jaw with a vicious open-handed slap. It knocked Ender sideways, into his bunk, and he almost fell. Then Bonzo slugged him, hard, in the stomach. Ender dropped to his knees.

"You disobeyed me," Bonzo said. Loudly, for all to hear. "No good soldier ever disobeys."

Even as he cried from the pain, Ender could not help but take vengeful pleasure in the murmurs he heard rising through the barracks. You fool, Bonzo. You aren't enforcing discipline, you're destroying it. They know I turned defeat into a draw. And now they see how you repay me. You made yourself look stupid in front of everyone. What is your discipline worth now?

The next day, Ender told Petra that for her sake the shooting practice in the morning would have to end. Bonzo didn't need anything that looked like a challenge now, and so she'd better stay clear of Ender for a while. She understood perfectly. "Besides," she said, "you're as close to being a good shot as you'll ever be."

He left his desk and flash suit in the locker. He would wear his Salamander uniform until he could get to the commissary and change it for the brown and black of Rat. He had brought no possessions with him; he would take none

away. There were none to have-- everything of value was in the school computer or his own head and hands.

He used one of the public desks in the game room to register for an earth-gravity personal combat course during the hour immediately after breakfast. He didn't plan to get vengeance on Bonzo for hitting him. But he did intend that no one would he able to do that to him again.

Ender's Game

8

Rat

"Colonel Graff, the games have always been run fairly before. Either random distribution of stars, or symmetrical."

"Fairness is a wonderful attribute, Major Anderson. It has nothing to do with war."

"The game will be compromised. The comparative standings will become meaningless."

"Alas."

"It will take months. Years, to develop the new battlerooms and run the simulations."

"That's why I'm asking you now. To begin. Be creative. Think of every stacked, impossible, unfair star arrangement you can. Think of other ways to bend the rules. Late notification. Unequal forces. Then run the simulations and see which ones are hardest, which easiest. We want an intelligent progression here. We want to bring him along."

"When do you plan to make him a commander? When he's eight?"

"Of course not. I haven't even assembled his army yet."

"Oh, so you're stacking it that way, too?"

"You're getting too close to the game, Anderson. You're forgetting that it is merely a training exercise.

"It's also status, identity, purpose, name; all that makes these children who they are comes out of this game. When it becomes known that the game can be manipulated, weighted, cheated, it will undo this whole school. I'm not exaggerating."

"I know."

"So I hope Ender Wiggin truly is the one, because you'll have defeated the effectiveness of our training method for a long time to come."

"If Ender isn't the one, if his peak of military brilliance does not coincide with the arrival of our fleets at the bugger homeworlds, then it doesn't really matter what our training method is or isn't."

"I hope you will forgive me, Colonel Graff, but I feel that I must report your orders and my opinion of their consequences to the Strategos and the Hegemon."

"Why not our dear Polemarch?"

"Everybody knows you have him in your pocket."

"Such hostility Major Anderson. And I thought we were friends."

"We are. And I think you may be right about Ender. I just don't believe you, and you alone, should decide the fate of the world."

"I don't even think it's right for me to decide the fate of Ender Wiggin."

"So you won't mind if I notify them?"

"Of course I mind, you meddlesome ass. This is something to be decided by people who know what they're doing, not these frightened politicians who got their office because they happen to be politically potent in the country they came from."

"But you understand why I'm doing it."

"Because you're such a short-sighted little bureaucratic bastard that you think you need to cover yourself in case things go wrong. Well, if things go wrong we'll all be bugger meat. So trust me now, Anderson, and don't bring the whole damn Hegemony down on review. What I'm doing is hard enough without them."

"Oh, is it unfair? Are things stacked against you? You can do it to Ender, but you can't take it, is that it?"

"Ender Wiggin is ten times smarter and stronger than I am. What I'm doing to him will bring out his genius. If I had to go through it myself, it would crush me. Major Anderson, I know I'm wrecking the game, and I know you love it better than any of the boys who play. Hate me if you like, but don't stop me."

"I reserve the right to communicate with the Hegemony and the Strategoi at any time. But for now do what you want."

"Thank you ever so kindly."

"Ender Wiggin, the little farthead who leads the standings, what a pleasure to have you with us." The commander of Rat Army lay sprawled on a lower bunk wearing only his desk. "With you around, how can any army lose?" Several of the boys nearby laughed.

There could not here been two more opposite armies

than Salamander and Rat. The room was rumpled, cluttered, noisy. After Bonzo Ender had thought that indiscipline would be a welcome relief. Instead, he found that he had come to expect quiet and order, and the disorder here made him uncomfortable.

"We doing OK, Ender Bender. I Rose de Nose, Jewboy extraordinaire, and you ain't nothin but a pinheaded pinprick of a goy. Don't you forget it."

Since the I.F. was formed the Strategos of the military forces had always been a Jew. There was a myth that Jewish generals didn't lose wars. And so far it was still true. It made any Jew at the Battle School dream of being Strategos, and conferred prestige on him from the start. It also caused resentment. Rat Army was often called the Kike Force, half in parody of Mazer Rackham's Strike Force. There were many who liked to remember that during the Second Invasion, even though an American Jew, as President, was Hegemon of the alliance, an Israeli Jew was Strategos in overall command of I.F. defense, and a Russian Jew was Polemarch of the fleet, it was Mazer Rackham, a little-known, twice-court-martialled, half-Maori New Zealander whose Strike Force broke up and finally destroyed the bugger fleet in the action around Saturn.

If Mazer Rackham could save the world, then it didn't matter a bit whether you were a Jew or not, people said.

But it did matter, and Rose the Nose knew it. He mocked himself to forestall the mocking comments of anti-semites-- almost everyone he defeated in battle became, at least for a time, a Jew-hater-- but he also made sure everyone knew what he was. His army was in second place, bucking for first.

"I took you on, goy, because I didn't want people to think I only win because I got great soldiers. I want them to know that even with a little puke of a soldier like you I can still win. We only got three rules here. Do what I tell you and don't piss in the bed."

Ender nodded. He knew that Rose wanted him to ask what the third rule was. So he did.

"That was three rules. We don't do too good in math here."

The message was clear. Winning is more important than anything.

"Your practice sessions with half-assed little Launchies are over, Wiggin. Done. You're in a big boys' army now. I'm putting you in Dink Meeker's toon. From now on, as far as

you're concerned, Dink Meeker is God."

"Then who are you?"

"The personnel officer who hired God." Rose grinned. "And you are forbidden to use your desk again until you've frozen two enemy soldiers in the same battle. This order is out of self-defense. I hear you're a genius programmer. I don't want you screwing around with my desk.

Everybody erupted in laughter. It took Ender a moment to understand why. Rose had programmed his desk to display-- and animate-- a bigger-than-life sized picture of male genitals, which waggled back and forth as Rose held the desk on his naked lap. This is just the sort of commander Bonzo would trade me to, thought Ender. How does a boy who spends his time like this win battles?

Ender found Dink Meeker in the game room, not playing, just sitting and watching. "A guy pointed you out," Ender said. "I'm Ender Wiggin."

"I know," said Meeker.

"I'm in your toon."

"I know," he said again.

"I'm pretty inexperienced."

Dink looked up at him. "Look, Wiggin, I know all this. Why do you think I asked Rose to get you for me?"

He had not been dumped, he had been picked up, he had been asked for. Meeker wanted him. "Why?" asked Ender.

"I've watched your practice sessions with the Launchies. I think you show some promise. Bonzo is stupid and I wanted you to get better training than Petra could give you. All she can do is shoot."

"I needed to learn that."

"You still move like you were afraid to wet your pants."

"So teach me."

"So learn."

"I'm not going to quit my freetime practice sessions."

"I don't want you to quit them."

"Rose the Nose does."

"Rose the Nose can't stop you. Likewise, he can't stop you from using your desk."

"I thought commanders could order anything."

"They can order the moon to turn blue, too, but it doesn't happen. Listen, Ender, commanders have just as much authority as you let them have. The more you obey them, the more power they have over you."

"What's to stop them from hurting me?" Ender remembered Bonzo's blow.

"I thought that was why you were taking personal attack classes."

"You've really been watching me, haven't you?"

Dink didn't answer.

"I don't want to get Rose mad at me. I want to be part of the battles now, I'm tired of sitting out till the end."

"Your standings will go down."

This time Ender didn't answer.

"Listen, Ender, as long as you're part of my toon, you're part of the battle."

Ender soon learned why. Dink trained his toon independently from the rest of Rat Army, with discipline and vigor; he never consulted with Rose, and only rarely did the whole army maneuver together. It was as if Rose commanded one army, and Dink commanded a much smaller one that happened to practice in the battleroom at the same time.

Dink started out the first practice by asking Ender to demonstrate his feet-first attack position. The other boys didn't like it. "How can we attack lying on our backs?" they asked.

To Ender's surprise, Dink didn't correct them, didn't say, "You aren't attacking on your back, you're dropping downward toward them." He had seen what Ender was doing, but he had not understood the orientation that it implied. It soon became clear to Ender that even though Dink was very, very good, his persistence in holding onto the corridor gravity orientation instead of thinking of the enemy gate as downward was limiting his thinking.

They practiced attacking an enemy-held star. Before trying Ender's feet-first method, they had always gone in standing up, their whole bodies available as a target. Even now, though, they reached the star and then assaulted the enemy from one direction only; "Over the top," cried Dink, and over they went. To his credit, he then repeated the exercise, calling, "Again, upside down," but because of their insistence on a gravity that didn't exist, the boys became awkward when the maneuver was under, as if vertigo seized them.

They hated the feet-first attack. Dink insisted that they use it. As a result, they hated Ender. "Do we have to learn how to fight from a Launchy?" one of them muttered, making sure Ender could hear. "Yes," answered Dink. They kept

working.

And they learned it. In practice skirmishes, they began to realize how much harder it was to shoot an enemy attacking feet first. As soon as they were convinced of that, they practiced the maneuver more willingly.

That night was the first time Ender had come to a practice session after a whole afternoon of work. He was tired.

“Now you're in a real army,” said Alai. "You don't have to keep practicing with us.”

“From you I can learn things that nobody knows,” said Ender.

"Dink Meeker is the best. I hear he's your toon leader.”

"Then let's get busy. I'll teach you what I learned from him today.”

He put Alai and two dozen others through the same exercises that had worn him out all afternoon. But he put new touches on the patterns, made the boys try the maneuvers with one leg frozen, with both legs frozen, or using frozen boys for leverage to change directions.

Halfway through the practice, Ender noticed Petra and Dink together, standing in the doorway, watching. Later, when he looked again, they were gone.

So they're watching me, and what we're doing is known. He did not know whether Dink was his friend; he believed that Petra was, but nothing could be sure. They might be angry that he was doing what only commanders and toon leaders were supposed to do-- drilling and training soldiers. They might be offended that a soldier would associate so closely with Launchies. It made him uneasy, to have older children watching.

“I thought I told you not to use your desk.” Rose the Nose stood by Ender's bunk.

Ender did not look up. "I'm completing the trigonometry assignment for tomorrow.”

Rose bumped his knee into Ender's desk. "I said not to use it.”

Ender set the desk on his bunk and stood up. "I need trigonometry more than I need you.”

Rose was taller than Ender by at least forty centimeters. But Ender was not particularly worried. It would not come to physical violence, and if it did, Ender thought he could hold his own. Rose was lazy and didn't know personal combat.

“You're going down in the standings, boy,” said Rose.

"I expect to. I was only leading the list because of the stupid way Salamander Army was using me."

"Stupid? Bonzo's strategy won a couple of key games."

"Bonzo's strategy wouldn't win a salad fight. I was violating orders every time I fired my gun."

Rose hadn't known that. It made him angry. "So everything Bonzo said about you was a lie. You're not only short and incompetent, you're insubordinate, too."

"But I turned defeat into stalemate, all by myself."

"We'll see how you do all by yourself next time." Rose went away.

One of Ender's toonmates shook his head. "You dumb as a thumb."

Ender looked at Dink, who was doodling on his desk. Dink looked up, noticed Ender watching him, and gazed steadily back at him. No expression. Nothing. OK, thought Ender, I can take care of myself.

Battle came two day's later. It was Ender's first time fighting as part of a toon; he was nervous. Dink's toon lined up against the right-hand wall of the corridor and Ender was very careful not to lean, not to let his weight slip to either side. Stay balanced.

"Wiggin!" called Rose the Nose.

Ender felt dread come over him from throat to groin. a tingle of fear that made him shudder. Rose saw it.

"Shivering? Trembling? Don't wet your pants, little Launchy." Rose hooked a finger over the butt of Ender's gun and pulled him to the forcefield that hid the battleroom from view. "We'll see how well you do now, Ender. As soon as that door opens, you jump through, go straight ahead toward the enemy's door."

Suicide. Pointless, meaningless self-destruction. But he had to follow orders now, this was battle, not school. For a moment Ender raged silently; then he calmed himself. "Excellent, sir," he said. "The direction I fire my gun is the direction of their main contingent."

Rose laughed. "You won't have time to fire anything, pinprick."

The wall vanished. Ender jumped up, took hold of the ceiling handholds, and threw himself out and down, speeding toward the enemy door.

It was Centipede Army, and they only beginning to emerge from their door when Ender was halfway across the battleroom. Many of them were able to get under cover of

stars quickly but Ender had doubled up his legs under him and, holding his pistol at his crotch, he was firing between his legs and freezing many of them as they emerged.

They flashed his legs, but he had three precious seconds before they could hit his body and put him out of action. He froze several more, then flung out his arms in equal and opposite directions. The hand that held his gun ended up pointing toward the main body of Centipede Army. He fired into the mass of the enemy, and then they froze him.

A second later he smashed into the forcefield of the enemy's door and rebounded with a crazy spin. He landed in a group of enemy soldiers behind a star; they shoved him off and spun him even more rapidly. He rebounded out of control through the rest of the battle, though gradually friction with the air slowed him down. He had no way of knowing how many men he had frozen before getting iced himself, but he did get the general idea that Rat Army won again, as usual.

After the battle Rose didn't speak to him. Ender was still first in the standings, since he had frozen three, disabled two, and damaged seven. There was no more talk about insubordination and whether Ender could use his desk. Rose stayed in his part of the barracks, and left Ender alone.

Dink Meeker began to practice instant emergence from the corridor-- Ender's attack on the enemy while they were still coming out of the door had been devastating. “If one man can do that much damage, think what a toon can do.” Dink got Major Anderson to open a door in the middle of a wall, even during practice sessions, instead of just the floor level door, so they could practice launching under battle conditions. Word got around. From now on no one could take five or ten or fifteen seconds in the corridor to size things up. The game had changed.

More battles. This time Ender played a proper role within a toon. He made mistakes. Skirmishes were lost. He dropped from first to second in the standings, then to fourth. Then he made fewer mistakes, and began to feel comfortable within the framework of the toon, and he went back up to third, then second, then first.

After practice one afternoon, Ender stayed in the battleroom. He had noticed that Dink Meeker usually came

late to dinner, and he assumed it was for extra practice. Ender wasn't very hungry, and he wanted to see what it was Dink practiced when no one else could see.

But Dink didn't practice. He stood near the door, watching Ender.

Ender stood across the room, watching Dink.

Neither spoke. It was plain Dink expected Ender to leave. It was just as plain that Ender was saying no.

Dink turned his back on Ender, methodically took off his flash suit, and gently pushed off from the floor. He drifted slowly toward the center of the room, very slowly, his body relaxing almost completely, so that his hands and arms seemed to be caught by almost nonexistent air currents in the room.

After the speed and tension of practice, the exhaustion, the alertness, it was restful just to watch him drift. He did it for ten minutes or so before he reached another wall. Then he pushed off rather sharply, returned to his flash suit, and pulled it on.

“Come on,” he said to Ender.

They went to the barracks. The room was empty, since all the boys were at dinner. Each went to his own bunk and changed into regular uniforms. Ender walked to Dink's bunk and waited for a moment till Dink was ready to go.

“Why did you wait?” asked Dink.

"Wasn't hungry.”

"Well, now you know why I'm not a commander.”

Ender had wondered.

"Actually, they promoted me twice, and I refused.”

"Refused?”

"They took away my old locker and bunk and desk, assigned me to a commander cabin and gave me an army. But I just stayed in the cabin until they gave in and put me back into somebody else's army.”

"Why?”

"Because I won't let them do it to me. I can't believe you haven't seen through all this crap yet, Ender. But I guess you're young. These other armies, they aren't the enemy. It's the teachers, they're the enemy. They get us to fight each other, to hate each other. The game is everything. Win win win, it amounts to nothing. We kill ourselves, go crazy trying to beat each other, and all the time the old bastards are watching us, studying us, discovering our weak points, deciding whether we're good enough or not. Well, good

enough for what? I was six years old when they brought me here. What the hell did I know? They decided I was right for the program, but nobody ever asked me if the program was right for me."

"So why don't you go home?"

Dink smiled crookedly. "Because I can't give up the game." He tugged at the fabric of his flash suit, which lay on the bunk beside him. "Because I love this."

"So why not be a commander?"

Dink shook his head. "Never. Look what it does to Rosen. The boy's crazy. Rose de Nose. Sleeps in here with us instead of in his cabin. Why? Because he's scared to be alone, Ender. Scared of the dark."

"Rose?"

"But they made him a commander and so he has to act like one. He doesn't know what he's doing. He's winning, but that scares him worst of all, because he doesn't know why he's winning, except that I have something to do with it. Any minute somebody could find out that Rosen isn't some magic Israeli general who can win no matter what. He doesn't know why anybody wins or loses. Nobody does."

"It doesn't mean he's crazy, Dink."

"I know, you've been here a year, you think these people are normal. Well, they're not. We're not. I look in the library, I call up books on my desk. Old ones, because they won't let us have anything new, but I've got a pretty good idea what children are, and we're not children. Children can lose sometimes, and nobody cares. Children aren't in armies, they aren't commanders, they don't rule over forty other kids, it's more than anybody can take and not get a little crazy."

Ender tried to remember what other children were like, in his class at school, back in the city. But all he could think of was Stilson.

"I had a brother. Just a normal guy. All he cared about was girls. And flying. He wanted to fly. He used to play ball with the guys. A pickup game, shooting balls at a hoop, dribbling down the corridors until the peace officers confiscated your ball. We had a great time. He was teaching me how to dribble when I was taken."

Ender remembered his own brother, and the memory was not fond.

Dink misunderstood the expression on Ender's face. "Hey, I know, nobody's supposed to talk about home. But we came from somewhere. The Battle School didn't create us,

you know. The Battle School doesn't create anything. It just destroys. And we all remember things from home. Maybe not good things, but we remember and then we lie and pretend that-- look, Ender, why is that nobody talks about home, ever? Doesn't that tell you how important it is? That nobody even admits that-- oh hell."

"No, it's all right," Ender said. "I was just thinking about Valentine. My sister."

"I wasn't trying to make you upset."

"It's OK. I don't think of her very much, because I always get like this."

"That's right, we never cry. Christ, I never thought of that. Nobody ever cries. We really are trying to be adult. Just like our fathers. I bet your father was like you. I bet he was quiet and took it, and then busted out and--"

"I'm not like my father."

"So maybe I'm wrong. But look at Bonzo, your old commander. He's got an advanced case of Spanish honor. He can't allow himself to have weaknesses. To be better than him, that's an insult. To be stronger, that's like cutting off his balls. That's why he hates you, because you didn't suffer when he tried to punish you. He hates you for that, he honestly wants to kill you. He's crazy. They're all crazy."

"And you aren't?"

"I be crazy too, little buddy, but at least when I be craziest, I be floating all alone in space and the crazy, she float out of me, she soak into the walls, and she don't come out till there be battles and little boy's bump into the walls and squish out de crazy."

Ender smiled.

"And you be crazy too," said Dink. "Come on, let's go eat."

"Maybe you can be a commander and not be crazy. Maybe knowing about the craziness means you don't have to fall for it."

"I'm not going to let the bastards run me, Ender. They've got you pegged, too, and they don't plan to treat you kindly, look what they've done to you so far."

"They haven't done anything except promote me."

"And she make you life so easy, neh?"

Ender laughed and shook his head. "So maybe you're right."

"They think they got you on ice. Don't let them."

"But that's what I came for," Ender said. "For them to

make me into a tool. To save the world."

"I can't believe you still believe it."

"Believe what?"

"The bugger menace. Save the world. Listen. Ender, if the buggers were coming back to get us, they'd be here. They aren't invading again. We beat them and they're gone.

"But the videos--"

"All from the First and Second Invasions. Your grandparents weren't born yet when Mazer Rackham wiped them out. You watch. It's all a fake. There is no war, and they're just screwing around with us."

"But why?"

"Because as long as people are afraid of the buggers, the I.F. can stay in power, and as long as the I.F. is in power, certain countries can keep their hegemony. But keep watching the vids, Ender. People will catch onto this game pretty soon, and there'll be a civil war to end all wars. That's the menace, Ender, not the buggers. And in that war, when it comes, you and I won't be friends. Because you're American, just like our dear teachers. And I am not."

They went to the mess hall and ate, talking about other things. But Ender could not stop thinking about what Dink had said. The Battle School was so enclosed, the game so important in the minds of the children, that Ender had forgotten there was a world outside. Spanish honor. Civil war. Politics. The Battle School was really a very small place, wasn't it?

But Ender did not reach Dink's conclusions. The buggers were real. The threat was real. The I.F. controlled a lot of things, but it didn't control the videos and the nets. Not where Ender had grown up. In Dink's home in the Netherlands, with three generations under Russian hegemony, perhaps it was all controlled, but Ender knew that lies could not last long in America. So he believed.

Believed, but the seed of doubt was there, and it stayed, and every now and then sent out a little root. It changed everything, to have that seed growing. It made Ender listen more carefully to what people meant, instead of what they said. It made him wise.

There weren't as many boys at the evening practice, not by half.

“Where's Bernard?” asked Ender.

Alai grinned. Shen closed his eves and assumed a look of blissful meditation.

“Haven't you heard?” said another boy, a Launchy from a younger group. "Word's out that any Launchy who comes to your practice sessions won't ever amount to anything in anybody's army. Word's out that the commanders don't want any soldiers who've been damaged by your training.”

Ender nodded.

“But the way I brain it,” said the Launchy, "I be the best soldier I can, and any commander worth a damn, he take me. Neh?”

“Eh,” said Ender, with finality.

They went on with practice. About a half hour into it, when they were practicing throwing off collisions with frozen soldiers, several commanders in different uniforms came in. They ostentatiously took down names.

“Hey,” shouted Alai. "Make sure you spell my name right!”

The next night there were even fewer boys. Now Ender was hearing the stories little Launchies getting slapped around in the bathrooms, or having accidents in the mess hall and the game room, or getting their files trashed by older boys who had broken the primitive security system that guarded the Launchies' desks.

“No practice tonight,” Ender said.

“The hell there's not,” said Alai.

"Give it a few days. I don't want any of the little kids getting hurt.”

"If you stop, even one night, they'll figure it works to do this kind of thing. Just like if you'd ever backed down to Bernard back when he was being a swine.”

“Besides,” said Shen. "We aren't scared and we don't care, so you owe it to us to go on. We need the practice and so do you.”

Ender remembered what Dink had said. The game was trivial compared to the whole world. Why should anybody give every night of his life to this stupid, stupid game?

“We don't accomplish that much anyway,” Ender said. He started to leave.

Alai stopped him. "They scare you, too? They slap you up in the bathroom? Stick you head in the pissah? Somebody gots a gun up you bung?”

“No,” Ender said.

“You still my friend?” asked Alai, more quietly.

"Yes.”

"Then I still you friend, Ender, and I stay here and practice with you.”

The older boys came again, but fewer of them were commanders. Most were members of a couple of armies. Ender recognized Salamander uniforms. Even a couple of Rats. They didn't take names this time. Instead, they mocked and shouted and ridiculed as the Launchies tried to master difficult skills with untrained muscles. It began to get to a few of the boys.

“Listen to them,” Ender said to the other boys. "Remember the words. If you ever want to make your enemy crazy, shout that kind of stuff at them. It makes them do dumb things, to be mad. But we don't get mad.”

Shen took the idea to heart, and after each jibe from the older boys, he had a group of four Launchies recite the words, loudly, five or six times. When they started singing the taunts like nursery rhymes, some of the older boys launched themselves from the wall and came out for a fight.

The flash suits were designed for wars fought with harmless light; they offered little protection and seriously hampered movement if it came to hand-to-hand fighting in nullo. Half the boys were flashed, anyway, and couldn't fight; but the stiffness of their suits made them potentially useful. Ender quickly ordered his Launchies to gather in one corner of the room. The older boys laughed at them even more, and some who had waited by the wall came forward to join in the attack, seeing Ender's group in retreat.

Ender and Alai decided to throw a frozen soldier in the face of an enemy. The frozen Launchy struck helmet first, and the two careened off each other. The older boy clutched his chest where the helmet had hit him, and screamed in pain.

The mockery was over. The rest of the older boys launched themselves to enter the battle. Ender didn't really have much hope of any of the boy's getting away without some injury. But the enemy was coming haphazardly, uncoordinatedly; they had never worked together before, while Ender's little practice army, though there were only a dozen of them now, knew each other well and knew how to work together.

“Go nova!” shouted Ender. The other boys laughed. They gathered into three groups, feet together, squatting, holding

hands so they formed small stars against the back wall. "We'll go around them and make for the door. Now!”

At his signal, the three stars burst apart, each boy launching in a different direction, but angled so he could rebound off a wall and head for the door. Since all of the enemy were in the middle of the room, where course changes were far more difficult, it was an easy maneuver to carry out.

Ender had positioned himself so that when he launched, he would rendezvous with the frozen soldier he had just used as a missile. The boy wasn't frozen now, and he let Ender catch him, whirl him around and send him toward the door, Unfortunately, the necessary result of the action was for Ender to head in the opposite direction, and at a reduced speed. Alone of all his soldiers, he was drifting fairly slowly, and at the end of the battleroom where the older boys were gathered. He shifted himself so he could see that all his soldiers were safely gathered at the far wall.

In the meantime, the furious and disorganized enemy had just spotted him. Ender calculated how soon he would reach the wall so he could launch again. Not soon enough. Several enemies had already rebounded toward him. Ender was startled to see Stilson's face among them. Then he shuddered and realized he had been wrong. Still, it was the same situation, and this time they wouldn't sit still for a single combat settlement. There was no leader, as far as Ender knew, and these boys were a lot bigger than him.

Still, he had learned some things about weightshifting in personal combat class, and about the physics of moving objects. Game battles almost never got to hand-to-hand combat-- you never bumped into an enemy that wasn't frozen. So in the few seconds he had, Ender tried to position himself to receive his guests.

Fortunately, they knew as little about nullo fighting as he did, and the few that tried to punch him found that throwing a punch was pretty ineffective when their bodies moved backward just as quickly as their fists moved forward. But there were some in the group who had bone-breaking on their minds, as Ender quickly saw. He didn't plan to be there for it, though.

He caught one of the punchers by the arm and threw him as hard as he could. It hurled Ender out of the way of the rest of the first onslaught, though he still wasn't getting any closer to the door. “Stay there!” he shouted at his friends, who obviously were forming up to come and rescue him.

"Just stay there!”

Someone caught Ender by the foot. The tight grip gave Ender some leverage; he was able to stamp firmly on the other boy's ear and shoulder, making him cry out and let go. If the boy had let go just as Ender kicked downward, it would have hurt much less and allowed Ender to use the maneuver as a launch. Instead, the boy had hung on too well; his ear was torn and scattering blood in the air, and Ender was drifting even more slowly.

I'm doing it again, thought Ender. I'm hurting people again, just to save myself. Why don't they leave me alone, so I don't have to hurt them?

Three more boys were converging on him now, and this time they were acting together. Still, they had to grab him before they could hurt him. Ender positioned himself quickly so that two of them would take his feet, leaving his hands free to deal with the third.

Sure enough, they took the bait. Ender grasped the shoulders of the third boy's shirt and pulled him up sharply, butting him in the face with his helmet. Again a scream and a shower of blood. The two boys who had his legs were wrenching at them, twisting him. Ender threw the boy with the bleeding nose at one of them; they entangled, and Ender's leg came free. It was a simple matter then to use the other boy's hold for leverage to kick him firmly in the groin, then shove off him in the direction of the door. He didn't get that good a launch, so that his speed was nothing special, but it didn't matter. No one was following him.

He got to his friends at the door. They caught him and handed him along to the door. They were laughing and slapping him playfully. “You bad!” they said. "You scary! You flame!”

“Practice is over for the day,” Ender said.

“They'll be back tomorrow,” said Shen.

“Won't do them any good,” said Ender. "If they come without suits, we'll do this again. If they come with suits, we can flash them.”

“Besides,” said Alai, "the teachers won't let it happen.”

Ender remembered what Dink had told him, and wondered if Alai was right.

“Hey Ender!” shouted one of the older boys as Ender left the battleroom. "You nothing, man! You be nothing!”

“My old commander Bonzo,” said Ender. "I think he doesn't like me.”

Ender checked the rosters on his desk that night. Four boys turned up on medical report. One with bruised ribs, one with a bruised testicle, one with a torn ear, and one with a broken nose and a loose tooth. The cause of injury was the same in all cases:

ACCIDENTAL COLLISION IN NULL G

If the teachers were allowing that to turn up on the official report, it was obvious they didn't intend to punish anyone for the nasty little skirmish in the battleroom. Aren't they going to do anything? Don't they care what goes on in this school?

Since he was back to the barracks earlier than usual, Ender called up the fantasy game on his desk. It had been a while since he last used it. Long enough that it didn't start him where he had left off. Instead, he began by the Giant's corpse. Only now, it was hardly identifiable as a corpse at all, unless you stood off a ways and studied it. The body had eroded into a hill, entwined with grass and vines. Only the crest of the Giant's face was still visible, and it was white bone, like limestone protruding from a discouraged, withering mountain.

Ender did not look forward to fighting with the wolf-children again, but to his surprise they weren't there. Perhaps, killed once, they were gone forever. It made him a little sad.

He made his way down underground, through the tunnels, to the cliff ledge overlooking the beautiful forest. Again he threw himself down, and again a cloud caught him and carried him into the castle turret room.

The snake began to unweave itself from the rug again, only this time Ender did not hesitate. He stepped on the head of the snake and crushed it under his foot. It writhed and twisted under him, and in response he twisted and ground it deeper into the stone floor. Finally it was still. Ender picked it up and shook it, until it unwove itself and the pattern in the rug was gone. Then, still dragging the snake behind him, he began to look for a way out.

Instead, he found a mirror. And in the mirror he saw a face that he easily recognized. It was Peter, with blood dripping down his chin and a snake's tail protruding from a corner of his mouth.

Ender shouted and thrust his desk from him. The few

boys in the barracks were alarmed at the noise, but he apologized and told them it was nothing. They went away. He looked again into his desk. His figure was still there, staring into the mirror. He tried to pick up some of the furniture, to break the mirror, but it could not be moved. The mirror would not come off the wall, either. Finally Ender threw the snake at it. The mirror shattered, leaving a hole in the wail behind it. Out of the hole came dozens of tiny snakes which quickly bit Ender's figure again and again. Tearing the snakes frantically from itself, the figure collapsed and died in a writhing heap of small serpents.

The screen went blank, and words appeared.

PLAY AGAIN?

Ender signed off and put the desk away.

The next day, several commanders came to Ender or sent soldiers to tell him not to worry, most of them thought the extra practice sessions were a good idea, he should keep it up. And to make sure nobody bothered him, they were sending a few of their older soldiers who needed extra practice to come join him. "They're as big as most of the buggers who attacked you last night. They'll think twice."

Instead of a dozen boys, there were forty-five that night, more than an army, and whether it was because of the presence of older boys on Ender's side or because they had had enough the night before, none of their enemies came.

Ender didn't go back to the fantasy game. But it lived in his dreams. He kept remembering how it felt to kill the snake, grinding it in, the way he tore the ear off that boy, the way he destroyed Stilson, the way he broke Bernard's arm. And then to stand up, holding the corpse of his enemy, and find Peter's face looking out at him from the mirror, This game knows too much about me. This game tells filthy lies. I am not Peter. I don't have murder in my heart.

And then the worse fear, that he was a killer, only better at it than Peter ever was; that it was this very trait that pleased the teachers. It's killers they need for the bugger wars. It's people who can grind the enemy's face into the dust and spatter their blood all over space.

Well, I'm your man. I'm the bloody bastard you wanted when you had me spawned. I'm your tool, and what difference does it make if I hate the part of me that you most need? What difference does it make that when the little

serpents killed me in the game, I agreed with them, and was glad.

Ender's Game

9

Locke and Demosthenes

"I didn't call you in here to waste time. How in hell did the computer do that?"

"I don't know."

"How could it pick up a picture of Ender's brother and put it into the graphics in this Fairyland routine?"

"Colonel Graff, I wasn't there when it was programmed. All I know is that the computer's never taken anyone to this place before. Fairyland was strange enough, but this isn't Fairyland anymore. It's beyond the End of the World, and--"

"I know the names of the places, I just don't know what they mean."

"Fairyland was programmed in. It's mentioned in a few other places. But nothing talks about the End of the World. We don't have any experience with it."

"I don't like having the computer screw around with Ender's mind that way. Peter Wiggin is the most potent person in his life, except maybe his sister Valentine."

"And the mind game is designed to help shape them, help them find worlds they can be comfortable in."

"You don't get it, do you, Major Imbu? I don't want Ender being comfortable with the end of the world. Our business here is not to be comfortable with the end of the world!"

"The End of the World in the game isn't necessarily the end of humanity in the bugger wars. It has a private meaning to Ender."

"Good. What meaning?"

"I don't know, sir. I'm not the kid. Ask him."

"Major Imbu, I'm asking you."

"There could be a thousand meanings."

"Try one."

"You've been isolating the boy. Maybe he's wishing for the end of this world, the Battle School. Or maybe it's about the end of the world he grew up with as a little boy, his

home, coming here. Or maybe it's his way of coping with having broken up so many other kids here. Ender's a sensitive kid, you know, and he's done some pretty bad things to people's bodies, he might be wishing for the end of that world."

"Or none of the above."

"The mind game is a relationship between the child and the computer. Together they create stories. The stories are true, in the sense that they reflect the reality of the child's life. That's all I know."

"And I'll tell you what I know, Major Imbu. That picture of Peter Wiggin was not one that could have been taken from our files here at the school. We have nothing on him, electronically or otherwise, since Ender came here. And that picture is more recent."

"It's only been a year and a half, sir, how much can the boy change?"

"He's wearing his hair completely differently now. His mouth was redone with orthodontia. I got a recent photograph from landside and compared. The only way the computer here in the Battle School could have got that picture was by requisitioning it from a landside computer. And not even one connected with the I.F. That takes requisitionary powers. We can't just go into Guilford County North Carolina and pluck a picture out of school files. Did anyone at this school authorize getting this?"

"You don't understand, sir. Our Battle School computer is only a part of the I.F. network. lf we want a picture, we have to get a requisition, but if the mind game program determines that the picture is necessary--"

"It can just go take it."

"Not just every day. Only when it's for the child's own good."

"OK, it's for his good. But why. His brother is dangerous, his brother was rejected for this program because he's one of the worst human beings we've laid hands on. Why is he so important to Ender? Why, after all his time?"

"Honestly, sir. I don't know. And the mind game program is designed so that it can't tell us. It may not know itself, actually. This is uncharted territory."

"You mean the computer's making this up as it goes along?"

"You might put it that way."

"Well, that does make me feel a little better. I thought l

was the only one."

Valentine celebrated Ender's eighth birthday alone, in the wooded back yard of their new home in Greensboro. She scraped a patch of ground bare of pine needles and leaves, and there scratched his name in the dirt with a twig. Then she made a small teepee of twigs and needles and lit a small fire. It made smoke that interwove with the branches and needles of the pine overhead. All the way into space, she said silently. All the way to the Battle School.

No letters had ever come, and as far as they knew their own letters had never reached him. When he first was taken, Father and Mother sat at the table and keyed in long letters to him every few days. Soon, though, it was once a week, and when no answers came, once a month. Now it had been two years since he went, and there were no letters, none at all, and no remembrance on his birthday. He is dead, she thought bitterly, because we have forgotten him.

But Valentine had not forgotten him. She did not let her parents know, and above all never hinted to Peter how often she thought about Ender, how often she wrote him letters that she knew he would not answer. And when Mother and Father announced to them that they were leaving the city to move to North Carolina, of all places, Valentine knew that they never expected to see Ender again. They were leaving the only place where he knew to find them. How would Ender find them here, among these trees, under this changeable and heavy sky? He had lived deep in corridors all his life, and if he was still in the Battle School, there was less of nature there. What would he make of this?

Valentine knew why they had moved here. It was for Peter, so that living among trees and small animals, so that nature in as raw a form as Mother and Father could conceive of it, might have a softening influence on their strange and frightening son. And, in a way, it had. Peter took to it right away. Long walks out in the open, cutting through woods and out into the open country-- going sometimes for a whole day, with only a sandwich or two sharing space with his desk in the pack on his back, with only a small pocket knife in his pocket.

But Valentine knew. She had seen a squirrel half-skinned, spiked by its little hands and feet with twigs pushed into the dirt. She pictured Peter trapping it, staking it, then carefully parting and peeling back the skin without breaking

into the abdomen, watching the muscles twist and ripple. How long had it taken the squirrel to die? And all the while Peter had sat nearby, leaning against the tree where perhaps the squirrel had nested, playing with his desk while the squirrel's life seeped away.

At first she was horrified, and nearly threw up at dinner, watching how Peter ate so vigorously, talked so cheerfully. But later she thought about it and realized that perhaps, for Peter, it was a kind of magic, like her little fires; a sacrifice that somehow stilled the dark gods that hunted for his soul. Better to torture squirrels than other children. Peter has always been a husbandman of pain, planting it, nurturing it, devouring it greedily when it was ripe; better he should take it in these small, sharp doses than with dull cruelty to children in the school.

“A model student,” said his teachers. "I wish we had a hundred others in the school just like him. Studies all the time, turns in all his work on time. He loves to learn.”

But Valentine knew it was a fraud. Peter loved to learn, all right, but the teachers hadn't taught him anything, ever. He did his learning through his desk at home, tapping into libraries and databases, studying and thinking and, above all, talking to Valentine. Yet at school he acted as though he were excited about the puerile lesson of the day. Oh, wow, I never knew that frogs looked like this inside, he'd say, and then at home he studied the binding of cells into organisms through the philotic collation of DNA. Peter was a master of flattery, and all his teachers bought it.

Still, it was good. Peter never fought anymore. Never bullied. Got along well with everybody. It was a new Peter.

Everyone believed it. Father and Mother said it so often it made Valentine want to scream at them. It isn't the new Peter! It's the old Peter, only smarter!

How smart? Smarter than you, Father. Smarter than you, Mother. Smarter than anybody you have ever met.

But not smarter than me.

“I've been deciding,” said Peter, "whether to kill you or what.”

Valentine leaned against the trunk of the pine tree, her little fire a few smoldering ashes. "I love you, too, Peter.”

"It would be so easy. You always make these stupid little fires. It's just a matter of knocking you out and burning you up. You're such a firebug.”

"I've been thinking of castrating you in your sleep.”

"No you haven't. You only think of things like that when I'm with you. I bring out the best in you. No, Valentine, I've decided not to kill you. I've decided that you're going to help me."

"I am?" A few years ago, Valentine would have been terrified at Peter's threats. Now, though, she was not so afraid. Not that she doubted that he was capable of killing her. She couldn't think of anything so terrible that she didn't believe Peter might do it. She also knew, though, that Peter was not insane, not in the sense that he wasn't in control of himself. He was in better control of himself than anyone she knew. Except perhaps herself. Peter could delay any desire as long as be needed to; he could conceal any emotion. And so Valentine knew that he would never hurt her in a fit of rage. He would only do it if the advantages outweighed the risks. And they did not. In a way, she actually preferred Peter to other people because of this. He always, always acted out of intelligent self-interest. And so, to keep herself safe, all she had to do was make sure it was more in Peter's interest to keep her alive than to have her dead.

"Valentine, things are coming to a head. I've been tracking troop movements in Russia."

"What are we talking about?"

"The world, Val. You know Russia? Big empire? Warsaw Pact? Rulers of Eurasia from the Netherlands to Pakistan?"

"They don't publish their troop movements, Peter."

"Of course not. But they do publish their passenger and freight train schedules. I've had my desk analyzing those schedules and figuring out when the secret troop trains are moving over the same tracks. Done it backward over the past three years. In the last six months, they've stepped up, they're getting ready for war. Land war."

"But what about the League? What about the buggers?" Valentine didn't know what Peter was getting at, but he often launched discussions like this, practical discussions of world events. He used her to test his ideas, to refine them. In the process, she also refined her own thinking. She found that while she rarely agreed with Peter about what the world ought to be, they rarely disagreed about what the world actually was. They had become quite deft at sifting accurate information out of the stories of the hopelessly ignorant, gullible news writers. The news herd, as Peter called them.

"The Polemarch is Russian, isn't he? And he knows what's happening with the fleet. Either they've found out the

buggers aren't a threat after all, or we're about to have a big battle. One way or another, the bugger war is about to be over. They're getting ready for after the war."

"If they're moving troops, it must be under the direction of the Strategos."

"It's all internal, within the Warsaw Pact."

This was disturbing. The facade of peace and cooperation had been undisturbed almost since the bugger wars began. What Peter had detected was a fundamental disturbance in the world order. She had a mental picture, as clear as memory, of the way the world had been before the buggers forced peace upon them. "So it's back to the way it was before."

"A few changes. The shields make it so nobody bothers with nuclear weapons anymore. We have to kill each other thousands at a time instead of millions." Peter grinned. "Val, it was bound to happen. Right now there's a vast international fleet and army in existence, with American hegemony. When the bugger wars are over, all that power will vanish, because it's all built on fear of the buggers. And suddenly we'll look around and discover that all the old alliances are gone, dead and gone, except one, the Warsaw Pact. And it'll be the dollar against five million lasers. We'll have the asteroid belt, but they'll have Earth, and you run out of raisins and celery kind of fast out there, without Earth."

What disturbed Valentine most of all was that Peter did not seem at all worried. "Peter, why do I get the idea that you are thinking of this as a golden opportunity for Peter Wiggin?"

"For both of us, Val."

"Peter, you're twelve years old. I'm ten. They have a word for people our age. They call us children and they treat us like mice."

"But we don't think like other children, do we, Val? We don't talk like other children. And above all, we don't write like other children."

"For a discussion that began with death threats, Peter, we've strayed from the topic, I think." Still, Valentine found herself getting excited. Writing was something Val did better than Peter. They both knew it. Peter had even named it once, when he said that he could always see what other people hated most about themselves, and bully them, while Val could always see what other people liked best about themselves, and flatter them. It was a cynical way of putting

it, but it was true. Valentine could persuade other people to her point of view-- she could convince them that they wanted what she wanted them to want. Peter, on the other hand, could only make them fear what he wanted them to fear. When he first pointed this out to Val, she resented it. She had wanted to believe she was good at persuading people because she was right, not because she was clever. But no matter how much she told herself that she didn't ever want to exploit people the way Peter did, she enjoyed knowing that she could, in her way, control other people. And not just control what they did. She could control, in a way, what they wanted to do. She was ashamed that she took pleasure in this power, and yet she found herself using it sometimes. To get teachers to do what she wanted, and other students. To get Mother and Father to see things her way. Sometimes, she was able to persuade even Peter. That was the most frightening thing of all-- that she could understand Peter well enough, could empathize with him enough to get inside him that way. There was more Peter in her than she could bear to admit, though sometimes she dared to think about it anyway. This is what she thought as Peter spoke: You dream of power, Peter, but in my own way I am more powerful than you.

“I've been studying history,” Peter said. "I've been learning things about patterns in human behavior. There are times when the world is rearranging itself, and at times like that, the right words can change the world. Think what Pericles did in Athens, and Demosthenes--”

"Yes, they managed to wreck Athens twice.”

"Pericles, yes, but Demosthenes was right about Philip--”

"Or provoked him--”

"See? This is what historians usually do, quibble about cause and effect when the point is, there are times when the world is in flux and the right voice in the right place can move the world. Thomas Paine and Ben Franklin, for instance. Bismarck. Lenin.”

“Not exactly parallel cases, Peter.” Now she was disagreeing with him out of habit; she saw what he was getting at, and she thought it might just be possible.

"I didn't expect you to understand. You still believe that teachers know something worth learning.”

I understand more than you think, Peter. "So you see yourself as Bismarck?”

"I see myself as knowing how to insert ideas into the public mind. Haven't you ever thought of a phrase, Val, a

clever thing to say, and said it, and then two weeks or a month later you hear some adult saying it to another adult, both of them strangers? Or you see it on a video or pick it up on a net?"

"I always figured I heard it before and only thought I was making it up."

"You were wrong. There are maybe two or three thousand people in the world as smart as us, little sister. Most of them are making a living somewhere. Teaching, the poor bastards, or doing research. Precious few of them are actually in positions of power."

"I guess we're the lucky few."

"Funny as a one-legged rabbit, Val."

"Of which there are no doubt several in these woods."

"Hopping in neat little circles."

Valentine laughed at the gruesome image and hated herself for thinking it was funny.

"Val, we can say the words that everyone else will be saying two weeks later. We can do that. We don't have to wait until we're grown up and safely put away in some career."

"Peter, you're twelve."

"Not on the nets I'm not. On the nets I can name myself anything I want, and so can you."

"On the nets we are clearly identified as students, and we can't even get into the real discussions except in audience mode, which means we can't say anything anyway."

"I have a plan."

"You always do." She pretended nonchalance but she listened eagerly.

"We can get on the nets as full-fledged adults. with whatever net names we want to adopt, if Father gets us onto his citizen's access."

"And why would he do that? We already have student access. What do you tell him, I need citizen's access so I can take over the world?"

"No, Val. I won't tell him anything. You'll tell him how you're worried about me. How I'm trying so very hard to do well at school, but you know it's driving me crazy because I can never talk to anybody intelligent, everybody always talks down to me because I'm young, I never get to converse with my peers. You can prove that the stress is getting to me."

Valentine thought of the corpse of the squirrel in the woods and realized that even that discovery was part of

Peter's plan. Or at least he had made it part of his plan, after it happened.

"So you get him to authorize us to share his citizen's access. To adopt our own identities there, to conceal who we are so people will give us the intellectual respect we deserve."

Valentine could challenge him on ideas, but never on things like this. She could not say, What makes you think you deserve respect? She had read about Adolf Hitler. She wondered what he was like at the age of twelve. Not this smart, not like Peter that way, but craving honor, probably that. And what would it have meant to the world if in childhood he had been caught in a thresher or trampled by a horse?

"Val," Peter said. "I know what you think of me. I'm not a nice person, you think."

Valentine threw a pine needle at him. "An arrow through your heart."

"I've been planning to come talk to you for a long time. But I kept being afraid."

She put a pine needle in her mouth and blew it at him. It dropped almost straight down. "Another failed launch." Why was he pretending to be weak?

"Val, I was afraid you wouldn't believe me. That you wouldn't believe I could do it."

"Peter, I believe you could do anything, and probably will."

"But I was even more afraid that you'd believe me and try to stop me."

"Come on, threaten to kill me again, Peter." Did he actually believe she could be fooled by his nice-and-humble-kid act?

"So I've got a sick sense of humor. I'm sorry. You know I was teasing. I need your help."

"You're just what the world needs. A twelve-year-old to solve all our problems."

"It's not my fault I'm twelve right now. And it's not my fault that right now is when the opportunity is open. Right now is the time when I can shape events. The world is always a democracy in times of flux, and the man with the best voice will win. Everybody thinks Hitler got to power because of his armies, because they were willing to kill, and that's partly true, because in the real world power is always built on the threat of death and dishonor. But mostly he got to power on

words-- on the right words at the right time."

"I was just thinking of comparing you to him."

"I don't hate Jews, Val. I don't want to destroy anybody. And I don't want war, either. I want the world to hold together. Is that so bad? I don't want us to go back to the old way. Have you read about the world wars?"

"Yes."

"We can go back to that again. Or worse. We could find ourselves locked into the Warsaw Pact. Now, there's a cheerful thought."

"Peter, we're children, don't you understand that? We're going to school, we're growing up--" But even as she resisted, she wanted him to persuade her. She had wanted him to persuade her from the beginning.

But Peter didn't know that he had already won. "If I believe that, if I accept that, then I've got to sit back and watch while all the opportunities vanish, and then when I'm old enough it's too late. Val, listen to me. I know how you feel about me, you always have. I was a vicious, nasty brother. I was cruel to you and crueler to Ender before they took him. But I didn't hate you. I loved you both, I just had to be-- had to have control, do you understand that? It's the most important thing to me, it's my greatest gift, I can see where the weak points are, I can see how to get in and use them, I just see those things without even trying. I could become a businessman and run some big corporation, I'd scramble and maneuver until I was at the top of everything and what would I have? Nothing. I'm going to rule, Val, I'm going to have control of something. But I want it to be something worth ruling. I want to accomplish something worthwhile. A Pax Americana through the whole world. So that when somebody else comes, after we beat the buggers, when somebody else comes here to defeat us, they'll find we've already spread over a thousand worlds, we're at peace with ourselves and impossible to destroy. Do you understand? I want to save mankind from self-destruction."

She had never seen him speak with such sincerity. With no hint of mockery, no trace of a lie in his voice. He was getting better at this. Or maybe he was actually touching on the truth. "So a twelve-year-old boy and his kid sister are going to save the world?"

"How old was Alexander? I'm not going to do it overnight. I'm just going to start now. If you'll help me."

"I don't believe what you did to those squirrels was part

of an act. I think you did it because you love to do it."

Suddenly Peter wept into his hands. Val assumed that he was pretending, but then she wondered. It was possible, wasn't it, that he loved her, and that in this time of terrifying opportunity he was willing to weaken himself before her in order to win her love. He's manipulating me, she thought, but that doesn't mean he isn't sincere. His cheeks were wet when he took his hands away, his eyes rimmed in red. "I know," he said. "It's what I'm most afraid of. That I really am a monster. I don't want to be a killer but I just can't help it."

She had never seen him show such weakness. You're so clever, Peter. You saved your weakness so you could use it to move me now. And yet it did move her. Because if it were true, even partly true. then Peter was not a monster, and so she could satisfy her Peter-like love of power without fear of becoming monstrous herself. She knew that Peter was calculating even now, but she believed that under the calculations he was telling the truth. It had been hidden layers deep, but he had probed her until he found her trust.

"Val, if you don't help me, l don't know what I'll become. But if you're there, my partner in everything, you can keep me from becoming -- like that. Like the bad ones."

She nodded. You are only pretending to share power with me, she thought, but in fact I have power over you. even though you don't know it. "I will. I'll help you."

As soon as Father got them both onto his citizen's access, they began testing he waters. They staved away from the nets that required use of a real name. That wasn't hard because real names only had to do with money. They didn't need money. They needed respect, and that they could earn. With false names, on the right nets, they could be anybody. Old men, middle-aged women, anybody, as long as they were careful about the way they wrote. All that anyone would see were their words, their ideas. Every citizen started equal, on the nets.

They used throwaway names with their early efforts. not the identities that Peter planned to make famous and influential. Of course they were not invited to take part in the great national and international political forums -- they could only be audiences there until they were invited or elected to take part. But they signed on and watched, reading some of

the essays published by the great names, witnessing the debates that played across their desks.

And in the lesser conferences, where common people commented about the great debates, they began to insert their comments. At first Peter insisted that they be deliberately inflammatory. "We can't learn how our style of writing is working unless we get responses -- and if we're bland, no one will answer."

They were not bland, and people answered. The responses that got posted on the public nets were vinegar; the responses that were sent as mail, for Peter and Valentine to read privately, were poisonous. But they did learn what attributes of their writing were seized upon as childish and immature. And they got better.

When Peter was satisfied that they knew how to sound adult, he killed the old identities and they began to prepare to attract real attention.

"We have to seem completely separate. We'll write about different things at different times. We'll never refer to each other. You'll mostly work on the west coast nets, and I'll mostly work in the south. Regional issues, too. So do your homework."

They did their homework. Mother and Father worried sometimes, with Peter and Valentine constantly together, their desks tucked under their arms. But they couldn't complain-- their grades were good, and Valentine was such a good influence on Peter. She had changed his whole attitude toward everything. And Peter and Valentine sat together in the woods, in good weather, and in pocket restaurants and indoor parks when it rained, and they composed their political commentaries. Peter carefully designed both characters so neither one had all of his ideas; there were even some spare identities that they used to drop in third party opinions. "Let both of them find a following as they can," said Peter.

Once, tired of writing and rewriting until Peter was satisfied, Val despaired and said, "Write it yourself, then!"

"I can't," he answered. "They can't both sound alike. Ever. You forget that someday we'll be famous enough that somebody will start running analyses. We have to come up as different people every time."

So she wrote on. Her main identity on the nets was Demosthenes -- Peter chose the name. He called himself Locke. They were obvious pseudonyms, but that was part of

the plan. "With any luck, they'll start trying to guess who we are."

"If we get famous enough, the government can always get access and find out who we really are."

"When that happens, we'll be too entrenched to suffer much loss. People will be shocked that Demosthenes and Locke are two kids, but they'll already be used to listening to us."

They began composing debates for their characters. Valentine would prepare an opening statement, and Peter would invent a throwaway name to answer her. His answer would be intelligent and the debate would be lively, lots of clever invective and good political rhetoric. Valentine had a knack for alliteration that made her phrases memorable. Then they would enter the debate into the network, separated by a reasonable amount of time, as if they were actually making them up on the spot. Sometimes a few other netters would interpose comments, but Peter and Val would usually ignore them or change their own comments only slightly to accommodate what had been said.

Peter took careful note of all their most memorable phrases and then did searches from time to time to find those phrases cropping up in other places. Not all of them did, but most of them were repeated here and there, and some of them even showed up in the major debates on the prestige nets. "We're being read," Peter said. "The ideas are seeping out."

"The phrases, anyway."

"That's just the measure. Look, we're having some influence. Nobody quotes us by name, yet, but they're discussing the points we raise. We're helping set the agenda. We're getting there."

"Should we try to get into the main debates?"

"No. We'll wait until they ask us."

They had been doing it only seven months when one of the west coast nets sent Demosthenes a message. An offer for a weekly column in a pretty good newsnet.

"I can't do a weekly column," Valentine said. "I don't even have a monthly period yet."

"The two aren't related," Peter said.

"They are to me. I'm still a kid."

"Tell them yes, but since you prefer not to have your true identity revealed, you want them to pay you in network time. A new access code through their corporate identity."

"So when the government traces me--"

"You'll just be a person who can sign on through CalNet. Father's citizen's access doesn't get involved. What I can't figure out is why they wanted Demosthenes before Locke."

"Talent rises to the top."

As a game, it was fun. But Valentine didn't like some of the positions Peter made Demosthenes take. Demosthenes began to develop as a fairly paranoid anti-Warsaw writer. It bothered her because Peter was the one who knew how to exploit fear in his writing -- she had to keep coming to him for ideas on how to do it. Meanwhile, his Locke followed her moderate, empathic strategies. It made sense, in a way. By having her write Demosthenes, it meant he also had some empathy, just as Locke also could play on others fears. But the main effect was to keep her inextricably tied to Peter. She couldn't go off and use Demosthenes for her own purposes. She wouldn't know how to use him. Still, it worked both ways. He couldn't write Locke without her. Or could he?

"I thought the idea was to unify the world. If I write this like you say I should, Peter, I'm pretty much calling for war to break up the Warsaw Pact."

"Not war, just open nets and prohibition of interception. Free flow of information. Compliance with the League rules, for heaven's sake."

Without meaning to, Valentine started talking in Demosthenes' voice, even though she certainly wasn't speaking Demosthenes' opinions. Everyone knows that from the beginning the Warsaw Pact was to be regarded as a single entity where those rules were concerned. International free flow is still open. But between the Warsaw Pact nations these things are internal matters. That was why they were willing to allow American hegemony in the League."

"You're arguing Locke's part, Val. Trust me. You have to call for the Warsaw Pact to lose official status. You have to get a lot of people really angry. Then, later, when you begin to recognize the need for compromise--"

"Then they stop listening to me and go off and fight a war."

"Val, trust me. I know what I'm doing."

"How do you know? You're not any smarter than me, and you've never done this before either."

"I'm thirteen and you're ten."

"Almost eleven."

"And I know how these things work."

"All right, I'll do it your way. But I won't do any of these liberty or death things."

"You will too."

"And someday when they catch us and they wonder why your sister was such a warmonger. I can just bet you'll tell them that you told me to do it."

"Are you sure you're not having a period, little woman?"

"I hate you, Peter Wiggin."

What bothered Valentine most was when her column got syndicated into several other regional newsnets, and Father started reading it and quoting from it at table. "Finally, a man with some sense," he said. Then he quoted some of the passages Valentine hated worst in her own work. "It's fine to work with these hegemonist Russians with the buggers out there, but after we win, I can't see leaving half the civilized world as virtual helots, can you, dear?"

"I think you're taking this all too seriously," said Mother.

"I like this Demosthenes. I like the way he thinks. I'm surprised he isn't in the major nets. I looked for him in the international relations debates and you know, he's never taken part in any of them."

Valentine lost her appetite and left the table. Peter followed her after a respectable interval.

"So you don't like lying to Father." he said. "So what? You're not lying to him. He doesn't think that you're really Demosthenes, and Demosthenes isn't saying things you really believe. They cancel each other out, they amount to nothing."

"That's the kind of reasoning that makes Locke such an ass." But what really bothered her was not that she was lying to Father -- it was the fact that Father actually agreed with Demosthenes. She had thought that only fools would follow him.

A few days later Locke got picked up for a column in a New England newsnet, specifically to provide a contrasting view for their popular column from Demosthenes. "Not bad for two kids who've only got about eight pubic hairs between them," Peter said.

"It's a long way between writing a newsnet column and ruling the world," Valentine reminded him. "It's such a long way that no one has ever done it."

"They have, though. Or the moral equivalent. I'm going to say snide things about Demosthenes in my first column."

"Well, Demosthenes isn't even going to notice that Locke

exists. Ever.”

"For now.”

With their identities now fully supported by their income from writing columns, they used Father's access now only for the throwaway identities. Mother commented that they were spending too much time on the nets. “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,” she reminded Peter.

Peter let his hand tremble a little, and he said, "If you think I should stop, I think I might be able to keep things under control this time. I really do.”

“No, no,” Mother said. "I don't want you to stop. Just be careful, that's all.”

"I'm careful, Mom.”

Nothing was different -- nothing had changed in a year. Ender was sure of it, and yet it all seemed to have gone sour. He was still the leading soldier in the standings, and no one doubted that he deserved it now. At the age of nine he was a toon leader in the Phoenix Army, with Petra Arkanian as his commander. He still led his evening practice sessions, and now they were attended by an elite group of soldiers nominated by their commanders, though any Launchy who wanted to could still come. Alai was also a toon leader, in another army, and they were still good friends; Shen was not a leader, but that was no barrier. Dink Meeker had finally accepted command and succeeded Rose the Nose in Rat Army's command. All is going well, very well, I couldn't ask for anything better--

So why do I hate my life?

He went through the paces of the practices and games. He liked teaching the boys in his toon, and they followed him loyally. He had the respect of everyone, and he was treated with deference in his evening practices. Commanders came to study what he did. Other soldiers approached his table at mess and asked permission to sit down. Even the teachers were respectful.

He had so much damn respect he wanted to scream.

He watched the young kids in his army, fresh out of their launch groups, watched how they played, how they made fun of their leaders when they thought no one was looking. He watched the camaraderie of old friends who had known each other in the Battle School for years, who talked

and laughed about old battles and long-graduated soldiers and commanders.

But with his old friends there was no laughter, no remembering. Just work. Just intelligence and excitement about the game, but nothing beyond that. Tonight it had come to a head in the evening practice. Ender and Alai were discussing the nuances of open-space maneuvers when Shen came up and listened for a few moments, then suddenly took Alai by the shoulders and shouted, “Nova! Nova! Nova!” Alai burst out laughing, and for a moment or two Ender watched them remember together the battle where open-room maneuvering had been for real, and they had dodged past the older boys and--

Suddenly they remembered that Ender was there. “Sorry, Ender,” Shen said.

Sorry. For what? For being friends? “I was there, too, you know,” Ender said.

And they apologized again. Back to business. Back to respect. And Ender realized that in their laughter, in their friendship, it had not occurred to them that he was included.

How could they think I was part of it? Did I laugh? Did I join in? Just stood there, watching, like a teacher.

That’s how they think of me, too. Teacher. Legendary soldier. Not one of them. Not someone that you embrace and whisper Salaam in his ear. That only lasted while Ender still seemed a victim. Still seemed vulnerable. Now he was the master soldier, and he was completely, utterly alone.

Feel sorry for yourself, Ender. He typed the words on his desk as he lay on his bunk. POOR ENDER. Then he laughed at himself and cleared away the words. Not a boy or girl in this school who wouldn't he glad to trade places with me.

He called up the fantasy game. He walked as he often did through the village that the dwarves had built in the hill made by the Giant's corpse. It was easy to build sturdy walls, with the ribs already curved just right, just enough space between them to leave windows. The whole corpse was cut into apartments, opening onto the path down the Giant's spine, The public amphitheatre was carved into the pelvic bowl, and the common herd of ponies was pastured between the Giant's legs. Ender was never sure what the dwarves were doing as they went about their business, but they left him alone as he picked his way through the village, and in return he did them no harm either.

He vaulted the pelvic bone at the base of the public

square, and walked through the pasture. The ponies shied away from him. He did not pursue them. Ender did not understand how the game functioned anymore. In the old days, before he had first gone to the End of the World, everything was combat and puzzles to solve defeat the enemy before he kills you, or figure out how to get past the obstacle. Now, though, no one attacked, there was no war, and wherever he went, there was no obstacle at all.

Except, of course, in the room in the castle at the End of the World. It was the one dangerous place left. And Ender, however often he vowed that he would not, always went back there, always killed the snake, always looked his brother in the face, and always, no matter what he did next, died.

It was no different this time. He tried to use the knife on the table to pry through the mortar and pull out a stone from the wall. As soon as he breached the seal of the mortar, water began to gush in through the crack, and Ender watched his death as his figure, now out of his control, struggled madly to stay alive, to keep from drowning. The windows of his room were gone, the water rose, and his figure drowned. All the while, the face of Peter Wiggin in the mirror stayed and looked at him.

I'm trapped here, Ender thought, trapped at the End of the World with no way out. And he knew at last the sour taste that had come to him, despite all his successes in the Battle School. It was despair.

There were uniformed men at the entrances to the school when Valentine arrived. They weren't standing like guards, but rather slouched around as if they were waiting for someone inside to finish his business. They wore the uniforms of I.F. Marines, the same uniforms that everyone saw in bloody combat on the videos. It lent an air of romance to that day at school: all the other kids where excited about it.

Valentine was not. It made her think of Ender, for one thing. And for another it made her afraid. Someone had recently published a savage commentary on the Demosthenes' collected writings. The commentary, and therefore her work, had been discussed on the open conference of the international relations net, with some of

the most important people of the day attacking and defending Demosthenes. What worried her most was the comment of an Englishman: "Whether he likes it or not, Demosthenes cannot remain incognito forever. He has outraged too many wise men and pleased too many fools to hide behind his too-appropriate pseudonym much longer. Either he will unmask himself in order to assume leadership of the forces of stupidity he has marshaled, or his enemies will unmask him in order to better understand the disease that has produced such a warped and twisted mind."

Peter had been delighted, but then he would be. Valentine was afraid, that enough powerful people had been annoyed by the vicious persona of Demosthenes that she would indeed be tracked down. The I.F. could do it, even if the American government was constitutionally bound not to. And here were I.F. troops gathered at Western Guilford Middle School, of all places. Nor exactly the regular recruiting grounds for the I.F. Marines.

So she was not surprised to find a message marching around her desk as soon as she logged in.

PLEASE LOG OFF AND GO TO DR.
LINEBERRY'S OFFICE AT ONCE.

Valentine waited nervously outside the principal's office until Dr. Lineberry opened the door and beckoned her inside. Her last doubt was removed when she saw the soft-bellied man in the uniform of an I.F. colonel sitting in the one comfortable chair in the room.

"You're Valentine Wiggin," he said.

"Yes," she whispered.

"I'm Colonel Graff. We've met before."

Before? When had she had any dealings with the I.F?

"I've come to talk to you in confidence, about your brother."

It's not just me, then, she thought. They have Peter. Or is this something new? Has he done something crazy? I thought he stopped doing crazy things.

"Valentine, you seem frightened. There's no need to be. Please, sit down. I assure you that your brother is well. He has more than fulfilled our expectations."

And now, with a great inward gush of relief, she realized that it was Ender they had come about. Ender. It wasn't punishment at all, it was little Ender, who had disappeared

so long ago, who was no part of Peter's plots now. You were the lucky one, Ender. You got away before Peter could trap you into his conspiracy.

"How do you feel about your brother, Valentine?"

"Ender?"

"Of course."

"How can I feel about him? I haven't seen him or heard from him since I was eight."

"Dr. Lineberry, will you excuse us?"

Lineberry was annoyed.

"On second thought, Dr. Lineberry, I think Valentine and I will have a much more productive conversation if we walk outside. Away from the recording devices that your assistant principal has placed in this room."

It was the first time Valentine had seen Dr. Lineberry speechless. Colonel Graff lifted a picture out from the wall and peeled a sound-sensitive membrane from the wall, along with its small broadcast unit. "Cheap," said Graff, "but effective. I thought you knew."

Lineberry took the device and sat down heavily at her desk. Graff led Valentine outside.

They walked out into the football field. The soldiers followed at a discreet distance: they split up and formed a large circle, to guard them from the widest possible perimeter.

"Valentine, we need your help for Ender."

"What kind of help?"

"We aren't even sure of that. We need you to help us figure out how you can help us."

"Well, what's wrong?"

"That's part of the problem. We don't know."

Valentine couldn't help but laugh. "I haven't seen him in three years! You've got him up there with you all the time!"

"Valentine, it costs more money than your father will make in his lifetime for me to fly to Earth and back to the Battle School again. I don't commute casually."

"The king had a dream," said Valentine, "but he forgot what it was, so he told his wise men to interpret the dream or they'd die. Only Daniel could interpret it, because he was a prophet."

"You read the Bible?"

"We're doing classics this year in advanced English. I'm not a prophet."

"I wish I could tell you everything about Ender's

situation. But it would take hours, maybe days, and afterward I'd have to put you in protective confinement because so much of it is strictly confidential. So let's see what we can do with limited information. There's a game that our students play with the computer." And he told her about the End of the World and the closed room and the picture of Peter in the mirror.

"It's the computer that puts the picture there, not Ender. Why not ask the computer?"

"The computer doesn't know."

"I'm supposed to know?"

"This is the second time since Ender's been with us that he's taken this game to a dead end. To a game that seems to have no solution.".

"Did he solve the first one?"

"Eventually."

"Then give him time, he'll probably solve this one."

"I'm not sure. Valentine, your brother is a very unhappy little boy."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know much, do you?"

Valentine thought for a moment that the man might get angry. Instead, though, he decided to laugh. "No, not much. Valentine, why would Ender keep seeing your brother Peter in the mirror?"

"He shouldn't. It's stupid."

"Why is it stupid?"

"Because if there's ever anybody who was the opposite of Ender, it's Peter."

"How?"

Valentine could not think of a way to answer that wasn't dangerous. Too much questioning about Peter could lead to real trouble. Valentine knew enough about the world to know that no one would take Peter's plans for world domination seriously, as a danger to existing governments. But they might well decide he was insane and needed treatment for his megalomania.

"You're preparing to lie to me," Graff said.

"I'm preparing not to talk to you anymore," Valentine answered.

"And you're afraid. Why are you afraid?"

"I don't like questions about my family. Just leave my family out of this."

"Valentine, I'm trying to leave your family out of this. I'm coming to you so I don't have to start a battery of tests on Peter and question your parents. I'm trying to solve this problem now, with the person Ender loves and trusts most in the world, perhaps the only person he loves and trusts at all. If we can't solve it this way, then we'll sequester your family and do as we like from then on. This is not a trivial matter, and I won't just go away."

The only person Ender loves and trusts at all. She felt a deep stab of pain, of regret, of shame that now it was Peter she was close to. Peter who was the center of her life. For you, Ender, I light fires en your birthday. For Peter I help fulfill all his dreams. "I never thought you were a nice man. Not when you came to take Ender away, and not now."

"Don't pretend to be an ignorant little girl. I saw your tests when you were little, and at the present moment there aren't very many college professors who could keep up with you."

"Ender and Peter hate each other."

"I knew that. You said they were opposites. Why?"

"Peter -- can be hateful sometimes."

"Hateful in what way?"

"Mean. Just mean, that's all."

"Valentine, for Ender's sake, tell me what he does when he's being mean."

"He threatens to kill people a lot. He doesn't mean it. But when we were little, Ender and I were both afraid of him. He told us he'd kill us. Actually, he told us he'd kill Ender."

"We monitored some of that."

"It was because of the monitor."

"Is that all? Tell me more about Peter."

So she told him about the children in every school that Peter attended. He never hit them, but he tortured them just the same. Found what they were most ashamed of and told it to the person whose respect they most wanted. Found what they most feared and made sure they faced it often.

"Did he do this with Ender?"

Valentine shook her head.

"Are you sure? Didn't Ender have a weak place? A thing he feared most, or that he was ashamed of?"

"Ender never did anything to be ashamed of." And suddenly, deep in her own shame for having forgotten and betrayed Ender, she started to cry.

"Why are you crying?"

She shook her head. She couldn't explain what it was like to think of her little brother, who was so good, whom she had protected for so long, and then remember that now she was Peter's ally, Peter's helper, Peter's slave in a scheme that was completely out of her control. Ender never surrendered to Peter, but I have turned, I've become part of him, as Ender never was. “Ender never gave in,” she said.

"To what?”

"To Peter. To being like Peter.”

They walked in silence along the goal line.

"How would Ender ever be like Peter?”

Valentine shuddered, "I already told you.”

"But Ender never did that kind of thing. He was just a little boy.”

"We both wanted to, though. We both wanted to kill Peter.”

"Ah.”

"No, that isn't true. We never said it, Ender never said that he wanted to do that. I just -- thought it. It was me, not Ender. He never said that he wanted to kill him.”

"What did he want?”

"He just didn't want to be--”

"To be what?”

"Peter tortures squirrels. He stakes them out on the ground and skins them alive and sits and watches them until they die. He did that, he doesn't do it now. But he did it. If Ender knew that, if Ender saw him, I think that he'd--”

"He'd what? Rescue the squirrels? Try to heal them?”

"No, in those days you didn't undo what Peter did. You didn't cross him. But Ender would be kind to squirrels. Do you understand? He'd feed them.”

"But if he fed them, they'd become tame, and that much easier for Peter to catch.”

Valentine began to cry again. "No matter what you do, it always helps Peter. Everything helps Peter, everything, you just can't get away, no matter what.”

“Are you helping Peter?” asked Graff.

She didn't answer.

"Is Peter such a very bad person, Valentine?”

She nodded.

"Is Peter the worst person in the world?”

"How can he be? I don't know. He's the worst person I know.”

"And yet you and Ender are his brother and sister. You

have the same genes, the same parents, how can he be so bad if--"

Valentine turned and screamed at him, screamed as if he were killing her. "Ender is not like Peter! He is not like Peter in any way! Except that he's smart, that's all-- in every other way a person could possibly be like Peter he is nothing nothing nothing like Peter! Nothing!"

"I see," said Graff.

"I know what you're thinking, you bastard, you're thinking that I'm wrong, that Ender's like Peter. Well maybe I'm like Peter, but Ender isn't, he isn't at all, I used to tell him that when he cried, I told him that lots of times, you're not like Peter, you never like to hurt people, you're kind and good and not like Peter at all!"

"And it's true."

His acquiescence calmed her. "Damn right it's true. It's true."

"Valentine, will you help Ender?"

"I can't do anything for him now."

"It's really the same thing you always did for him before. Just comfort him and tell him that he never likes to hurt people, that he's good and kind and not like Peter at all, That's the most important thing. That he's not like Peter at all."

"I can see him?"

"No. I want you to write a letter."

"What good does that do? Ender never answered a single letter I sent."

Graff sighed. "He answered every letter he got."

It took only a second for her to understand. "You really stink."

"Isolation is -- the optimum environment for creativity. It was his ideas we wanted, not the -- never mind, I don't have to defend myself to you."

Then why are you doing it, she did not ask.

"But he's slacking off. He's coasting. We want to push him forward, and he won't go."

"Maybe I'd be doing Ender a favor if I told you to go stuff yourself."

"You've already helped me. You can help me more. Write to him."

"Promise you won't cut out anything I write."

"I won't promise any such thing."

"Then forget it."

"No problem. I'll write your letter myself. We can use your other letters to reconcile the writing styles. Simple matter."

"I want to see him."

"He gets his first leave when he's eighteen."

"You told him it would be when he was twelve."

"We changed the rules."

"Why should I help you!"

"Don't help me. Help Ender. What does it matter if that helps us, too?"

"What kind of terrible things are you doing to him up there?"

Graff chuckled. "Valentine, my dear little girl, the terrible things are only about to begin."

Ender was four lines into the letter before he realized that it wasn't from one of the other soldiers in the Battle School. It had come in the regular way -- a MAIL WAITING message when he signed into his desk. He read four lines into it, then skipped to the end and read the signature. Then he went back to the beginning, and curled up on his bed to read the words over and over again.

ENDER,

THE BASTARDS WOULDN'T PUT ANY OF MY LETTERS THROUGH TILL NOW. I MUST HAVE WRITTEN A HUNDRED TIMES BUT YOU MUST HAVE THOUGHT I NEVER DID. WELL, I DID. I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN YOU. I REMEMBER YOUR BIRTHDAY. I REMEMBER EVERYTHING. SOME PEOPLE MIGHT THINK THAT BECAUSE YOU'RE BEING A SOLDIER YOU ARE NOW A CRUEL AND HARD PERSON WHO LIKES TO HURT PEOPLE, LIKE THE MARINES IN THE VIDEOS, BUT I KNOW THAT ISN'T TRUE. YOU ARE NOTHING LIKE YOU-KNOW-WHO. HE'S NICER-SEEMING BUT HE'S STILL A SLUMBITCH INSIDE. MAYBE YOU SEEM MEAN, BUT IT WON'T FOOL ME. STILL PADDLING THE OLD KNEW, ALL MY LOVE TURKEY LIPS,

VAL

DON'T WRITE BACK THEY'LL PROBLY SIKOWANALIZE

YOUR LETTER.

Obviously it was written with the full approval of the teachers. But there was no doubt it was written by Val. The spelling of psychoanalyze, the epithet slumbitch for Peter, the joke about pronouncing knew like canoe were all things that no one could know but Val.

And yet they came pretty thick, as though someone wanted to make very sure that Ender believed that the letter was genuine. Why should they be so eager if it's the real thing?

It isn't the real thing anyway. Even if she wrote it in her own blood, it isn't the real thing because they made her write it. She'd written before, and they didn't let any of those letters through. Those might have been real, but this was asked for, this was part of their manipulation.

And the despair filled him again. Now he knew why. Now he knew what he hated so much. He had no control over his own life. They ran everything. They made all the choices. Only the game was left to him, that was all, everything else was them and their rules and plans and lessons and programs, and all he could do was go this way or that way in battle. The one real thing, the one precious real thing was his memory of Valentine, the person who loved him before he ever played a game, who loved him whether there was a bugger war or not, and they had taken her and put her on their side. She was one of them now.

He hated them and all their games. Hated them so badly that he cried, reading Val's empty asked-for letter again. The other boys in Phoenix Army noticed and looked away. Ender Wiggin crying? That was disturbing. Something terrible was going on. The best soldier in any army, lying on his bunk crying. The silence in the room was deep.

Ender deleted the letter, wiped it out of memory and then punched up the fantasy game. He was not sure why he was so eager to play the game, to get to the End of the World, but he wasted no time getting there. Only when he coasted on the cloud, skimming over the autumnal colors of the pastoral world, only then did he realize what he hated most about Val's letter. All that it said was about Peter. About how he was not at all like Peter. The words she had said so often as she held him, comforted him as he trembled in fear and rage and loathing after Peter had tortured him, that was all that the letter had said.

And that was what they had asked for. The bastards knew about that, and they knew about Peter in the mirror in the castle room, they knew about everything and to them Val was just one more tool to use to control him, just one more trick to play. Dink was right, they were the enemy, they loved nothing and cared for nothing and he was not going to do what they wanted, he was damn well not going to do anything for them. He had had only one memory that was safe, one good thing, and those bastards had plowed it into him with the rest of the manure -- and so he was finished, he wasn't going to play.

As always the serpent waited in the tower room, unraveling itself from the rug on the floor. But this time Ender didn't grind it underfoot. This time he caught it in his hands, knelt before it, and gently, so gently, brought the snake's gaping mouth to his lips.

And kissed.

He had not meant to do that. He had meant to let the snake bite him on the mouth. Or perhaps he had meant to eat the snake alive, as Peter in the mirror had done, with his bloody chin and the snake's tail dangling from his lips. But he kissed it instead.

And the snake in his hands thickened and bent into another shape. A human shape. It was Valentine, and she kissed him again.

The snake could not be Valentine. He had killed it too often for it to be his sister. Peter had devoured it too often to bear it that it might have been Valentine all along.

Was this what they planned when they let him read her letter? He didn't care.

She arose from the floor of the tower room and walked to the mirror. Ender made his figure also rise and go with her. They stood before the mirror, where instead of Peter's cruel reflection there stood a dragon and a unicorn. Ender reached out his hand and touched the mirror; the wall fell open and revealed a great stairway downward, carpeted and lined with shouting, cheering multitudes. Together, arm in arm, he and Valentine walked down the stairs. Tears filled his eyes, tears of relief that at last he had broken free of the End of the World. And because of the tears, he didn't notice that every member of the multitude wore Peter's face. He only knew that wherever he went in this world, Valentine was with him.

Valentine read the letter that Dr. Lineberry had given her. “Dear Valentine,” it said, "We thank you and commend you for your efforts on behalf of the war effort. You are hereby notified that you have been awarded the Star of the Order of the League of Humanity, First Class, which is the highest military award that can be given to a civilian. Unfortunately, I.F. security forbids us to make this award public until after the successful conclusion of current operations, but we want you to know that your efforts resulted in complete success. Sincerely, General Shimon Levy, Strategos.”

When she had read it twice Dr. Lineberry took it from her hands. “I was instructed to let you read it, and then destroy it.” She took a cigarette lighter from a drawer and set the paper afire. It burned brightly in the ashtray. “Was it good or bad news?” she asked.

“I sold my brother,” Valentine said, "and they paid me for it.”

"That's a bit melodramatic, isn't it, Valentine?”

Valentine went back to class without answering.

That night Demosthenes published a scathing denunciation of the population limitation laws. People should be allowed to have as many children as they like, and the surplus population should be sent to other worlds, to spread mankind so far across the galaxy that no disaster, no invasion could ever threaten the human race with annihilation. “The most noble title any child can have,” Demosthenes wrote, "is Third.”

For you, Ender, she said to herself as she wrote.

Peter laughed in delight when he read it. "That'll make them sit up and take notice. Third! A noble title! Oh, you have a wicked streak.”

Ender's Game

10

Dragon

"Now?"

"I suppose so.

"It has to be an order, Colonel Graff. Armies don't move because a commander says 'I suppose it's time to attack.'"

"I'm not a commander. I'm a teacher of little children."

"Colonel, sir, I admit I was on you, I admit I was a pain in the ass, but it worked, everything worked just like you wanted it to. The last few weeks Ender's even been, been--"

"Happy."

"Content. He's doing well. His mind is keen, his play is excellent. Young as he is. we've never had a boy better prepared for command. Usually they go at eleven. but at nine and a half he's top flight."

"Well, yes. For a few minutes there, it actually occurred to me to wonder what kind of a man would heal a broken child of some of his hurt, just so he could throw him back into battle again. A little private moral dilemma. Please overlook it. I was tired."

"Saving the world, remember?"

"Call him in."

"We're doing what must be done, Colonel Graff."

"Come on, Anderson, you're just dying to see how he handles all those rigged games I had you work out."

"That's a pretty low thing to--"

"So I'm a low kind of guy. Come on, Major. We're both the scum of the earth. I'm dying to see how he handles them, too. After all, our lives depend on him doing real well. Neh?"

"You're not starting to use the boys' slang, are you?"

"Call him in, Major. I'll dump the rosters into his files and give him his security system. What we're doing to him isn't all bad, you know. He gets his privacy again."

"Isolation, you mean."

"The loneliness of power. Go call him in."

"Yes sir. I'll be back with him in fifteen minutes."

"Good-bye. Yes sir yessir yezzir. I hope you had fun, I hope you had a nice, nice time being happy, Ender. It might be the last time in your life. Welcome, little boy. Your dear Uncle Graff has plans for you."

Ender knew what was happening from the moment they brought him in. Everyone expected him to go commander early. Perhaps not this early, but he had topped the standings almost continuously for three years, no one else was remotely close to him, and his evening practices had become the most prestigious group in the school. There were some who wondered why the teachers had waited this long.

He wondered which army they'd give him. Three commanders were graduating soon, including Petra, but it was beyond hope for them to give him Phoenix Army. No one ever succeeded to command of the same army he was in when he was promoted.

Anderson took him first to his new quarters. That sealed it -- only commanders had private rooms. Then he had him fitted for new uniforms and a new flash suit. He looked on the forms to discover the name of his army.

Dragon, said the form. There was no Dragon Army.

"I've never heard of Dragon Army," Ender said.

"That's because there hasn't been a Dragon Army in four years. We discontinued the name because there was a superstition about it. No Dragon Army in the history of the Battle School ever won even a third of its games. It got to be a joke."

"Well, why are you reviving it now?"

"We had a lot of extra uniforms to use up."

Graff sat at his desk, looking fatter and wearier than the last time Ender had seen him. He handed Ender his hook, the small box that commanders used to go where they wanted in the battleroom during practices. Many times during his evening practice sessions Ender wished that he had a hook, instead of having to rebound off walls to get where he wanted to go. Now that he'd got quite deft at maneuvering without one, here it was. "It only works," Anderson pointed out, "during your regularly scheduled practice sessions." Since Ender already planned to have extra practices, it meant the hook would only be useful some of the time. It also explained why so many commanders never held extra practices. They depended on the hook, and it wouldn't do anything for them during the extra times. If they felt that the

hook was their authority, their power over the other boys, then they were even less likely to work without it. That's an advantage I'll have over some of my enemies, Ender thought.

Graff's official welcome speech sounded bored and over-rehearsed. Only at the end did he begin to sound interested in his own words. "We're doing something unusual with Dragon Army. I hope you don't mind. We've assembled a new army by advancing the equivalent of an entire launch course early and delaying the graduation of quite a few advanced students. I think you'll be pleased with the quality of your soldiers. I hope you are, because we're forbidding you to transfer any of them."

"No trades?" asked Ender. It was how commanders always shored up their weak points, by trading around.

"None. You see, you have been conducting your extra practice sessions for three years now. You have a following. Many good soldiers would put unfair pressure on their commanders to trade them into your army. We've given you an army that can, in time, be competitive. We have no intention of letting you dominate unfairly."

"What if I've got a soldier I just can't get along with?"

"Get along with him." Graff closed his eyes. Anderson stood up and the interview was over.

Dragon was assigned the colors grey, orange, grey; Ender changed into his flash suit, then followed the ribbons of light until he came to the barracks that contained his army. They were there already, milling around near the entrance. Ender took charge at once. "Bunking will be arranged by seniority. Veterans to the back of the room, newest soldiers to the front."

It was the reverse of the usual pattern, and Ender knew it. He also knew that he didn't intend to be like many commanders, who never even saw the younger boys because they were always in the back.

As they sorted themselves out according to their arrival dates, Ender walked up and down the aisle. Almost thirty of his soldiers were new, straight out of their launch group. completely inexperienced in battle. Some were even underage -- the ones nearest the door were pathetically small. Ender reminded himself that that's how he must have looked to Bonzo Madrid when he first arrived. Still, Bonzo had had only one underage soldier to cope with.

Not one of the veterans belonged to Ender's elite practice group. None had ever been a toon leader. None, in fact, was

older than Ender himself, which meant that even his veterans didn't have more than eighteen months' experience. Some he didn't even recognize, they had made so little impression.

They recognized Ender, of course, since he was the most celebrated soldier in the school. And some, Ender could see, resented him. At least they did me one favor -- none of my soldiers is older than me.

As soon as each soldier had a bunk, Ender ordered them to put on their flash suits and come to practice. “We're on the morning schedule, straight to practice after breakfast. Officially you have a free hour between breakfast and practice. We'll see what happens after I find out how good you are.” After three minutes, though many of them still weren't dressed, he ordered them out of the room.

“But I'm naked!” said one boy.

“Dress faster next time. Three minutes from first call to running out the door -- that's the rule this week. Next week the rule is two minutes. Move!” It would soon be a joke in the rest of the school that Dragon Army was so dumb they had to practice getting dressed.

Five of the boys were completely naked, carrying their flash suits as they ran through the corridors; few were fully dressed. They attracted a lot of attention as they passed open classroom doors. No one would be late again if he could help it.

In the corridors leading to the battleroom, Ender made them run back and forth in the halls, fast, so they were sweating a little, while the naked ones got dressed. Then he led them to the upper door, the one that opened into the middle of the battleroom just like the doors in the actual games. Then he made them jump up and use the ceiling handholds to hurl themselves into the room. “Assemble on the far wall,” he said. "As if you were going for the enemy's gate.”

They revealed themselves as they jumped, four at a time, through the door. Almost none of them knew how to establish a direct line to the target, and when they reached the far wall few of the new ones had any idea how to catch on or even control their rebounds.

The last boy out was a small kid, obviously underage. There was no way he was going to reach the ceiling handhold.

“You can use a side handhold if you want,” Ender said.

“Go suck on it,” said the boy. He took a flying leap,

touched the ceiling handhold with a finger tip, and hurtled through the door with no control at all, spinning in three directions at once. Ender tried to decide whether to like the little kid for refusing to take a concession or to be annoyed at his insubordinate attitude.

They finally got themselves together along the wall. Ender noticed that without exception they had lined up with their heads still in the direction that had been up in the corridor. So Ender deliberately took hold of what they were treating as a floor and dangled from it upside down. “Why are you upside down, soldiers?” he demanded.

Some of them started to turn the other way.

“Attention!” They held still. "I said why are you upside down!”

No one answered. They didn't know what he expected.

"I said why does every one of you have his feet in the air and his head toward the ground!”

Finally one of them spoke. "Sir, this is the direction we were in coming out of the door.”

"Well what difference is that supposed to make! What difference does it make what the gravity was back in the corridor! Are we going to fight in the corridor? Is there any gravity here?”

No sir. No sir .

"From now on, you forget about gravity before you go through that door. The old gravity is gone, erased. Understand me? Whatever your gravity is when you get to the door, remember -- the enemy's gate is down. Your feet are toward the enemy's gate. Up is toward your own gate. North is that way, south is that way, east is that way, west is -- what way?”

They pointed.

"That's what I expected. The only process you've mastered is the process of elimination, and the only reason you've mastered that is because you can do it in the toilet. What was the circus I saw out here! Did you call that forming up? Did you call that flying? Now everybody, launch and form up on the ceiling! Right now! Move!”

As Ender expected, a good number of them instinctively launched, not toward the wall with the door in it, but toward the wall that Ender had called north, the direction that had been up when they were in the corridor. Of course they quickly realized their mistake, but too late -- they had to wait to change things until they had rebounded off the north wall.

In the meantime, Ender was mentally grouping them into slow learners and fast learners. The littlest kid, the one who had been last out of the door, was the first to arrive at the correct wall, and he caught himself adroitly. They had been right to advance him. He'd do well. He was also cocky and rebellious, and probably resented the fact that he had been one of the ones Ender had sent naked through the corridors.

“You!” Ender said, pointing at the small one. "Which way is down?”

“Toward the enemy door.” The answer was quick. It was also surly, as if to say, OK, OK, now get on with the important stuff.

"Name, kid?”

"This soldier's name is Bean, sir.”

“Get that for size or for brains?” The other boys laughed a little. "Well, Bean, you're right onto things. Now listen to me, because this matters. Nobody's going to get through that door without a good chance of getting hit. In the old days, you had ten, twenty seconds before you even had to move. Now if you aren't already streaming out of the door when the enemy comes out, you're frozen. Now, what happens when you're frozen?”

“Can't move,” one of the boys said.

“That's what frozen means,” Ender said. "But what happens to you?”

It was Bean, not intimidated at all, who answered intelligently. "You keep going in the direction you started in. At the speed you were going when you were flashed.”

"That's true. You five, there on the end, move!”

Startled, the boys looked at each other, Ender flashed them all. "The next five, move!”

They moved. Ender flashed them, too, but they kept moving, heading toward the walls. The first five, though, were drifting uselessly near the main group.

“Look at these so-called soldiers,” Ender said. "Their commander ordered them to move, and now look at them. Not only are they frozen, they're frozen right here, where they can get in the way. While the others, because they moved when they were ordered, are frozen down there, plugging up the enemy's lanes, blocking the enemy's vision. I imagine that about five of you have understood the point of this. And no doubt Bean is one of them. Right, Bean?”

He didn't answer at first. Ender looked at him until he

said, "Right, sir."

"Then what is the point?"

"When you are ordered to move, move fast, so if you get iced you'll bounce around instead of getting in the way of your own army's operations."

"Excellent. At least I have one soldier who can figure things out." Ender could see resentment growing in the way the other soldiers shifted their weight and glanced at each other, the way they avoided looking at Bean. Why am I doing this? What does this have to do with being a good commander, making one boy the target of all the others? Just because they did it to me, why should I do it to him? Ender wanted to undo his taunting of the boy, wanted to tell the others that the little one needed their help and friendship more than anyone else. But of course Ender couldn't do that. Not on the first day. On the first day even his mistakes had to look like part of a brilliant plan.

Ender hooked himself nearer the wall and pulled one of the boys away from the others. "Keep your body straight," said Ender. He rotated the boy in midair so his feet pointed toward the others. When the boy kept moving his body, Ender flashed him. The others laughed. "How much of his body could you shoot?" Ender asked a boy directly under the frozen soldier's feet.

"Mostly all I can hit is his feet."

Ender turned to the boy next to him. "What about you?"

"I can see his body."

"And you?"

A boy a little farther down the wall answered. "All of him."

"Feet aren't very big. Not much protection." Ender pushed the frozen soldier out of the way. Then he doubled his legs under him, as if he were kneeling in midair, and flashed his own legs. Immediately the legs of his suit went rigid, holding them in that position.

Ender twisted himself in the air so that he knelt above the other boys.

"What do you see?" he asked.

A lot less, they said.

Ender thrust his gun between his legs. "I can see fine," he said, and proceeded to flash the boys directly under him. "Stop me!" he shouted. "Try and flash me!"

They finally did, but not until he had flashed more than a third of them. He thumbed his hook and thawed himself

and every other frozen soldier. “Now,” he said "which way is the enemy's gate?”

"Down!”

"And what is our attack position?”

Some started to answer with words, but Bean answered by flipping himself away from the wall with his legs doubled under him, straight toward the opposite wall, flashing between his legs all the way.

For a moment Ender wanted to shout at him, to punish him; then he caught himself, rejected the ungenerous impulse. Why should I be so angry at this little boy? “Is Bean the only one who knows how?” Ender shouted.

Immediately the entire army pushed off toward the opposite wall, kneeling in the air, firing between their legs, shouting at the top of their lungs. There may be a time, thought Ender, when this is exactly the strategy I'll need -- forty screaming boys in an unbalancing attack.

When they were all at the other side, Ender called for them to attack him, all at once. Yes, thought Ender. Not bad. They gave me an untrained army, with no excellent veterans, but at least it isn't a crop of fools. I can work with this.

When they were assembled again, laughing and exhilarated, Ender began the real work. He had them freeze their legs in the kneeling position. "Now, what are your legs good for, in combat?”

Nothing, said some boys.

“Bean doesn't think so,” said Ender.

"They're the best way to push off walls.”

“Right,” Ender said, The other boy's started to complain that pushing off walls was movement, not combat.

“There is no combat without movement,” Ender said. They fell silent and hated Bean a little more. "Now, with your legs frozen like this, can you push off walls?”

No one dared answer, for fear they'd he wrong. “Bean?” asked Ender.

"I've never tried it, but maybe if you faced the wall and doubled over at the waist--”

"Right but wrong. Watch me. My back's to the wall, legs are frozen. Since I'm kneeling, my feet are against the wall. Usually, when you push off you have to push downward, so you string out your body behind you like a string bean, right?”

Laughter.

"But with my legs frozen, I use pretty much the same

force, pushing downward from the hips and thighs, only now it pushes my shoulders and my feet backward, shoots out my hips, and when I come loose my body's tight, nothing stringing out behind me. Watch this."

Ender forced his hips forward, which shot him away from the wall; in a moment he readjusted his position and was kneeling, legs downward, rushing toward the opposite wall. He landed on his knees, flipped over on his back, and jackknifed off the wall in another direction. "Shoot me!" he shouted. Then he set himself spinning in the air as he took a course roughly parallel to the boys along the far wall. Because he was spinning, they couldn't get a continuous beam on him.

He thawed his suit and hooked himself back to them. "That's what we're working on for the first half hour today. Build up some muscles you didn't know you had. Learn to use your legs as a shield and control your movements so you can get that spin. Spinning doesn't do any good up close, but far away, they can't hurt you if you're spinning -- at that distance the beam has to hit the same spot for a couple of moments, and if you're spinning it can't happen. Now freeze yourself and get started."

"Aren't you going to assign lanes?" asked a boy.

"No I'm not going to assign lanes. I want you bumping into each other and learning how to deal with it all the time, except when we're practicing formations, and then I'll usually have you bump into each other on purpose. Now move!"

When he said move, they moved.

Ender was the last one out after practice, since he stayed to help some of the slower ones improve on technique. They'd had good teachers, but the inexperienced soldiers fresh out of their launch groups were completely helpless when it came to doing two or three things at the same time. It was fine to practice jackknifing with frozen legs, they had no trouble maneuvering in midair, but to launch in one direction, fire in another, spin twice, rebound with a jackknife off a wall, and come out firing, facing the right direction -- that was way beyond them. Drill drill drill, that was all Ender would be able to do with them for a while. Strategies and formations were nice, but they were nothing if the army didn't know how to handle themselves in battle.

He had to get this army ready now. He was early at being a commander, and the teachers were changing the rules now, not letting him trade, giving him no top-notch

veterans. There was no guarantee that they'd give him the usual three months to get his army together before sending them into battle.

At least in the evenings he'd have Alai and Shen to help him train his new boys.

He was still in the corridor leading out of the battleroom when he found himself face to face with little Bean. Bean looked angry. Ender didn't want problems right now.

"Ho, Bean."

"Ho, Ender."

Pause.

"Sir ," Ender said softly.

"I know what you're doing, Ender, sir, and I'm warning you."

"Warning me?"

"I can be the best man you've got, but don't play games with me."

"Or what?"

"Or I'll be the worst man you've got. One or the other,"

"And what do you want, love and kisses?" Ender was getting angry now.

Bean looked unworried. "I want a toon."

Ender walked back to him and stood looking down into his eyes. "Why should you get a toon?"

"Because I'd know what to do with it."

"Knowing what to do with a toon is easy," Ender said. "It's getting them to do it that's hard. Why would any soldier want to follow a little pinprick like you?"

"They used to call you that, I hear. I hear Bonzo Madrid still does."

"I asked you a question, soldier."

"I'll earn their respect, if you don't stop me."

Ender grinned. "I'm helping you."

"Like hell," said Bean.

"Nobody would notice you, except to feel sorry for the little kid. But I made sure they all noticed you today. They'll be watching every move you make. All you have to do to earn their respect now is be perfect."

"So I don't even get a chance to learn before I'm being judged."

"Poor kid. Nobody's treatin' him fair." Ender gently pushed Bean back against the wall. "I'll tell you how to get a toon. Prove to me you know what you're doing as a soldier. Prove to me you know how to use other soldiers. And then

prove to me that somebody's willing to follow you into battle. Then you'll get your toon. But not bloody well until."

Bean smiled. "That's fair. If you actually work that way, I'll be a toon leader in a month."

Ender reached down and grabbed the front of his uniform and shoved him into the wall. "When I say I work a certain way, Bean, then that's the way I work."

Bean just smiled. Ender let go of him and walked away. When he got to his room he lay down on his bed and trembled. What am I doing? My first practice session and I'm already bullying people the way Bonzo did. And Peter. Shoving people around. Picking on some poor little kid so the others'll have somebody they all hate. Sickening. Everything I hated in a commander, and I'm doing it.

Is it some law of human nature that you inevitably become whatever your first commander was? I can quit right now, if that's so.

Over and over he thought of the things he did and said in his first practice with his new army. Why couldn't he talk like he always did in his evening practice group? No authority except excellence. Never had to give orders, just made suggestions. But that wouldn't work, not with an army. His informal practice group didn't have to learn to do things together. They didn't have to develop a group feeling; they never had to learn how to hold together and trust each other in battle. They didn't have to respond instantly to command.

And he could go to the other extreme, too. He could be as lax and incompetent as Rose the Nose, if he wanted. He could make stupid mistakes no matter what he did. He had to have discipline, and that meant demanding -- and getting -- quick, decisive obedience. He had to have a well-trained army, and that meant drilling the soldiers over and over again, long after they thought they had mastered a technique, until it was so natural to them that they didn't have to think about it anymore.

But what was this thing with Bean? Why had he gone for the smallest, weakest, and possibly the brightest of the boys? Why had he done to Bean what had been done to Ender by commanders that he despised.

Then he remembered that it hadn't begun with his commanders. Before Rose and Bonzo had treated him with contempt, he had been isolated in his launch group. And it wasn't Bernard who began that, either. It was Graff.

It was the teachers who had done it. And it wasn't an

accident. Ender realized that now. It was a strategy. Graff had deliberately set him up to be separate from the other boys, made it impossible for him to be close to them. And he began now to suspect the reasons behind it. It wasn't to unify the rest of the group -- in fact, it was divisive. Graff had isolated Ender to make him struggle. To make him prove, not that he was competent, but that he was far better than everyone else. That was the only way he could win respect and friendship. It made him a better soldier than he would ever have been otherwise. It also made him lonely, afraid, angry, untrusting. And maybe those traits, too, made him a better soldier.

That's what I'm doing to you, Bean. I'm hurting you to make you a better soldier in every way. To sharpen your wit. To intensify your effort. To keep you off balance, never sure what's going to happen next, so you always have to be ready for anything, ready to improvise, determined to win no matter what. I'm also making you miserable. That's why they brought you to me, Bean. So you could be just like me. So you could grow up to be just like the old man.

And me -- am I supposed to grow up like Graff? Fat and sour and unfeeling, manipulating the lives of little boys so they turn out factory perfect, generals and admirals ready to lead the fleet in defense of the homeland. You get all the pleasures of the puppeteer. Until you get a soldier who can do more than anyone else. You can't have that. It spoils the symmetry. You must get him in line, break him down, isolate him, beat him until he gets in line with everyone else.

Well, what I've done to you this day, Bean, I've done. But I'll be watching you, more compassionately than you know, and when the time is right you'll find that I'm your friend, and you are the soldier you want to be.

Ender did not go to classes that afternoon. He lay on his bunk and wrote down his impressions of each of the boys in his army, the things he noticed right about them, the things that needed more work. In practice tonight, he would talk with Alai and they'd figure out ways to teach small groups the things they needed to know. At least he wouldn't be in this thing alone.

But when Ender got to the battleroom that night, while most others were still eating, he found Major Anderson waiting for him. "There has been a rule change, Ender. From now on, only members of the same army may work together in a battleroom during freetime. And, therefore, battlerooms

are available only on a scheduled basis. After tonight, your next turn is in four days."

"Nobody else is holding extra practices."

"They are row, Ender. Now that you command another army, they don't want their boys practicing with you. Surely you can understand that. So they'll conduct their own practices."

"I've always been in another army from them. They still sent their soldiers to me for training."

"You weren't commander then."

"You gave me a completely green army, Major Anderson, sir--"

"You have quite a few veterans."

"They aren't any good."

"Nobody gets here without being brilliant, Ender. Make them good."

"I needed Alai and Shen to--"

"It's about time you grew up and did some things on your own, Ender. You don't need these other boys to hold your hand. You're a commander now. So kindly act like it, Ender."

Ender walked past Anderson toward the battleroom. Then he stopped, turned, asked a question. "Since these evening practices are now regularly scheduled, does it mean I can use the hook?"

Did Anderson almost smile? No. Not a chance of that. "We'll see," he said.

Ender turned his back and went on into the battleroom. Soon his army arrived, and no one else; either Anderson waited around to intercept anyone coming to Ender's practice group, or word had already passed through the whole school that Ender's informal evenings were through.

It was a good practice, they accomplished a lot, but at the end of it Ender was tired and lonely. There was a half hour before bedtime. He couldn't go into his army's barracks -- he had long since learned that the best commanders stay away unless they have some reason to visit. The boys have to have a chance to be at peace, at rest, without someone listening to favor or despise them depending on the way they talk and act and think.

So he wandered to the game room, where a few other boys were using the last half hour before final bell to settle bets or beat their previous scores on the games. None of the games looked interesting, but he played one anyway, an easy

animated game designed for Launchies. Bored, he ignored the objectives of the game and used the little player-figure, a bear, to explore the animated scenery around him.

"You'll never win that way."

Ender smiled, "Missed you at practice, Alai."

"I was there. But they had your army in a separate place. Looks like you're big time now, can't play with the little boys anymore."

"You're a full cubit taller than I am."

"Cubit! Has God been telling you to build a boat or something? Or are you in an archaic mood?"

"Not archaic, just arcane. Secret, subtle, roundabout. I miss you already, you circumcised dog."

"Don't you know? We're enemies now. Next time I meet you in battle, I'll whip your ass."

It was banter, as always, but now there was too much truth behind it. Now when Ender heard Alai talk as if it were all a joke, he felt the pain of losing a friend, and the worse pain of wondering if Alai really felt as little pain as he showed.

"You can try," said Ender. "I taught you everything you know. But I didn't teach you everything I know."

"I knew all along that you were holding something back, Ender.

A pause. Ender's bear was in trouble on the screen. He climbed a tree. "I wasn't, Alai. Holding anything back."

"I know." said Alai. "Neither was I."

"Salaam, Alai."

"Alas, it is not to be."

"What isn't?"

"Peace. It's what salaam means. Peace be unto you."

The words brought forth an echo from Ender's memory. His mother's voice reading to him softly, when he was very young. Think not that I came to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword. Ender had pictured his mother piercing Peter the Terrible with a bloody rapier, and the words had stayed in his mind along with the image.

In the silence, the bear died. It was a cute death, with funny music. Ender turned around. Alai was already gone. He felt like part of himself had been taken away, an inward prop that was holding up his courage and confidence. With Alai, to a degree impossible even with Shen, Ender had come to feel a unity so strong that the word we came to his lips much more easily than I.

But Alai had left something behind. Ender lay in bed, dozing into the night, and felt Alai's lips on his cheek as he muttered the word peace. The kiss, the word, the peace were with him still. I am only what I remember, and Alai is my friend in memories so intense that they can't tear him out. Like Valentine, the strongest memory of all.

The next day he passed Alai in the corridor, and they greeted each other, touched hands, talked, but they both knew that there was a wall now. It might be breached, that wall, sometime in the future, but for now the only real conversation between them was the roots that had already grown low and deep, under the wall, where they could not be broken.

The most terrible thing, though, was the fear that the wall could never be breached, that in his heart Alai was glad of the separation, and was ready to be Ender's enemy. For now that they could not be together, they must be infinitely apart, and what had been sure and unshakable was now fragile and insubstantial; from the moment we are not together, Alai is a stranger, for he has a life now that will be no part of mine, and that means that when I see him we will not know each other.

It made him sorrowful, but Ender did not weep. He was done with that. When they had turned Valentine into a stranger, when they had used her as a tool to work on Ender, from that day forward they could never hurt him deep enough to make him cry again. Ender was certain of that.

And with that anger, he decided he was strong enough to defeat them--the teachers, his enemies.

Ender's Game

11

Veni Vidi Vici

"You can't be serious about this schedule of battles."

"Yes I can."

"He's only had his army three and a half weeks."

"I told you. We did computer simulations on probable results. And here is what the computer estimated Ender would do."

"We want to teach him, not give him a nervous breakdown."

"The computer knows him better than we do."

"The computer is also not famous for having mercy."

"If you wanted to be merciful, you should have gone to a monastery."

"You mean this isn't a monastery?"

"This is best for Ender, too. We're bringing him to his full potential."

"I thought we'd give him two years as commander. We usually give them a battle every two weeks, starting after three months. This is a little extreme."

"Do we have two years to spare?"

"I know. I just have this picture of Ender a year from now. Completely useless, worn out, because he was pushed farther than he or any living person could go."

"We told the computer that our highest priority was having the subject remain useful after the training program."

"Well, as long as he's useful--"

"Look, Colonel Graff, you're the one who made me prepare this, over my protests, if you'll remember."

"I know, you're right, I shouldn't burden you with my conscience. But my eagerness to sacrifice little children in order to save mankind is wearing thin. The Polemarch has been to see the Hegemon. It seems Russian intelligence is concerned that some of the active citizens on the nets are already figuring how America ought to use the I.F. to destroy the Warsaw Pact as soon as the buggers are destroyed."

"Seems premature."

"It seems insane. Free speech is one thing, but to jeopardize the League over nationalistic rivalries -- and it's for people like that, short-sighted, suicidal people, that we're pushing Ender to the edge of human endurance."

"I think you underestimate Ender."

"But I fear that I also underestimate the stupidity of the rest of mankind. Are we absolutely sure that we ought to win this war?"

"Sir, those words sound like treason."

"It was black humor."

"It wasn't funny. When it comes to the buggers, nothing--"

"Nothing is funny, I know."

Ender Wiggin lay on his bed staring at the ceiling. Since becoming commander, he never slept more than five hours a night. But the lights went off at 2200 and didn't come on again until 0600. Sometimes he worked at his desk, anyway, straining his eyes to use the dim display. Usually, though, he stared at the invisible ceiling and thought.

Either the teachers had been kind to him after all, or he was a better commander than he thought. His ragged little group of veterans, utterly without honor in their previous armies, were blossoming into capable leaders. So much so that instead of the usual four toons, he had created five, each with a toon leader and a second; every veteran had a position. He had the army drill in eight man toon maneuvers and four-man half-toons, so that at a single command, his army could be assigned as many as ten separate maneuvers and carry them out at once. No army had ever fragmented itself like that before, but Ender was not planning to do anything that had been done before, either. Most armies practiced mass maneuvers, preformed strategies. Ender had none. Instead he trained his toon leaders to use their small units effectively in achieving limited goals. Unsupported, alone, on their own initiative. He staged mock wars after the first week, savage affairs in the practice room that left everybody exhausted. But he knew, with less than a mouth of training, that his army had the potential of being the best fighting group ever to play the game.

How much of this did the teachers plan? Did they know they were giving him obscure but excellent boys? Did they give him thirty Launchies, many of them underage, because

they knew the little boys were quick learners, quick thinkers? Or was this what any similar group could become under a commander who knew what he wanted his army to do, and knew how to teach them to do it?

The question bothered him, because he wasn't sure whether he was confounding or fulfilling their expectations.

All he was sure of was that he was eager for battle. Most armies needed three months because they had to memorize dozens of elaboration formations. We're ready now. Get us into battle.

The door opened in darkness. Ender listened. A shuffling step. The door closed.

He rolled off his bunk and crawled in the darkness the two meters to the door. There was a slip of paper there. He couldn't read it, of course, but he knew what it was. Battle. How kind of them. I wish, and they deliver.

Ender was already dressed in his Dragon Army flash suit when the lights came on. He ran down the corridor at once, and by 0601 he was at the door of his army's barracks.

"We have a battle with Rabbit Army at 0700. I want us warmed up in gravity and ready to go. Strip down and get to the gym. Bring your flash suits and we'll go to the battleroom from there."

What about breakfast?

"I don't want anybody throwing up in the battleroom."

Can we at least take a leak first?

"No more than a deciliter."

They laughed. The ones who didn't sleep naked stripped down; everyone bundled up their flash suits and followed Ender at a jog through the corridors to the gym. He put them through the obstacle course twice, then split them into rotations on the tramp, the mat, and the bench. "Don't wear yourselves out, just wake yourselves up." He didn't need to worry about exhaustion. They were in good shape, light and agile, and above all excited about the battle to come. A few of them spontaneously began to wrestle -- the gym, instead of being tedious, was suddenly fun, because of the battle to come. Their confidence was the supreme confidence of those who have never been into the contest, and think they are ready. Well, why shouldn't they think so? They are. And so am I.

At 0640 he had them dress out. He talked to the toon leaders and their seconds while they dressed. "Rabbit Army is mostly veterans, but Carn Carby was made their commander only five months ago, and I never fought them under him. He was a pretty good soldier, and Rabbit has done fairly well in the standings over the years. But I expect to see formations, and so I'm not worried."

At 0650 he made them all lie down on the mats and relax. Then, at 0656, he ordered them up and they jogged along the corridor to the battleroom, Ender occasionally leaped up to touch the ceiling. The boys all jumped to touch the same spot on the ceiling. Their ribbon of color led to the left; Rabbit Army had already passed through to the right. And at 0658 they reached their gate to the battleroom.

The toons lined up in five columns. A and F ready to grab the side handholds and flip themselves out toward the sides. B and D lined up to catch the two parallel ceiling holds and flip upward into nul gravity. C toon were ready to slap the sill of the doorway and flip downward.

Up, down, left, right; Ender stood at front, between columns so he'd be out of the way and reoriented them. "Which way is the enemy's gate?"

Down, they all said, laughing. And in that moment up became north, down became south, and left and right became east and west.

The grey wall in front of them disappeared, and the battleroom was visible. It wasn't a dark game, but it wasn't a bright one either -- the lights were about half, like dusk. In the distance, in the dim light, he could see the enemy door, their lighted flash suits already pouring out. Ender knew a moment's pleasure. Everyone had learned the wrong lesson from Bonzo's misuse of Ender Wiggin. They all dumped through the door immediately, so that there was no chance to do anything other than name the formation they would use. Commanders didn't have time to think. Well, Ender would take the time, and trust his soldiers' ability to fight with flashed legs to keep them intact as they came late through the door.

Ender sized up the shape of the battleroom. The familiar open grid of most early games, like the monkey bars at the park, with seven or eight stars scattered through the grid. There were enough of them, and in forward enough positions, that they were worth going for. "Spread to the near stars," Ender said. "C try to slide the wall. If it works, A and F

will follow. If it doesn't, I'll decide from there. I'll be with D. Move."

All the soldiers knew what was happening, but tactical decisions were entirely up to the toon leaders. Even with Ender's instructions, they were only ten seconds late getting through the gate. Rabbit Army was already doing some elaborate dance down at their end of the room. In all the other armies Ender had fought in, he would have been worrying right now about making sure he and his toon were in their proper place in their own formation. Instead, he and all his men were only thinking of ways to slip around past the formation, control the stars and the corners of the room, and then break the enemy formation into meaningless chunks that didn't know what they were doing. Even with less than four weeks together, the way they fought already seemed like the only intelligent way, the only possible way. Ender was almost surprised that Rabbit Army didn't know already that they were hopelessly out of date.

C toon slipped along the wall, coasting with their bent knees facing the enemy. Crazy Tom, the leader of C toon, had apparently ordered his men to flash their own legs already. It was a pretty good idea in this dim light, since the lighted flash suits went dark wherever they were frozen. It made them less easily visible. Ender would commend him for that.

Rabbit Army was able to drive back C toon's attack, but not until Crazy Tom and his boys had carved them up, freezing a dozen Rabbits before they retreated to the safety of a star. But it was a star behind the Rabbit formation, which meant they were going to be easy pickings now.

Han Tzu, commonly called Hot Soup, was the leader of D toon. He slid quickly along the lip of the star to where Ender knelt. "How about flipping off the north wall and kneeling on their faces?"

"Do it." Ender said. "I'll take B south to get behind them." Then he shouted, "A and E slow on the walls!" He slid forward along the star, hooked his feet on the lip, and flipped himself up to the top wall, then rebounded down to E toon's star. In a moment he was leading them down against the south wall. They rebounded in near perfect unison and came up behind the two stars that Carn Carby's soldiers were defending. It was like cutting butter with a hot knife. Rabbit Army was gone, just a little cleanup left to do. Ender broke his toons up into half-toons to scour the corners for any enemy soldiers who were whole or merely damaged. In three

minutes his toon leaders reported the room clean. Only one of Ender's boys was completely frozen -- one of C toon, which had borne the brunt of the assault -- and only five were disabled. Most were damaged, but those were leg shots and many of them were self-inflicted. All in all, it had gone even better than Ender expected.

Ender had his toon leaders do the honors at the gate -- four helmets at the corners, and Crazy Tom to pass through the gate. Most commanders took whoever was left alive to pass the gate; Ender could have picked practically anyone. A good battle.

The lights went full, and Major Anderson himself came through the teachergate at the south end of the battleroom. He looked very solemn as he offered Ender the teacher hook that was ritually given to the victor in the game. Ender used it to thaw his own army's flash suits, of course, and he assembled them in toons before thawing the enemy. Crisp, military appearance, that's what he wanted when Carby and Rabbit Army got their bodies under control again. They may curse us and lie about us, but they'll remember that we destroyed them, and no matter what they say other soldiers and other commanders will see that in their eyes; in those Rabbit eyes, they'll see us in neat formation, victorious and almost undamaged in our first battle. Dragon Army isn't going to be an obscure name for long.

Carn Carby came to Ender as soon as he was unfrozen. He was a twelve-year-old, who had apparently made commander only in his last year at the school. So he wasn't cocky, like the ones who made it at eleven. I will remember this, thought Ender, when I am defeated. To keep dignity, and give honor where it's due, so that defeat is not disgrace. And I hope I don't have to do it often.

Anderson dismissed Dragon Army last, after Rabbit Army had straggled through the door that Ender's boys had come through. Then Ender led his army through the enemy's door. The light along the bottom of the door reminded them of which way was down once they got back to gravity. They all landed lightly on their feet, running. They assembled in the corridor. “It's 0715,” Ender said, “and that means you have fifteen minutes for breakfast before I see you all in the battleroom for the morning practice.” He could hear them silently saying, Come on, we won, let us celebrate. All right, Ender answered, you may. "And you have your commander's permission to throw food at each other during breakfast.”

They laughed, they cheered, and then he dismissed them and sent them jogging on to the barracks. He caught his toon leaders on the way out and told them he wouldn't expect anyone to come to practice till 0745, and that practice would be over early so the boys could shower. Half an hour for breakfast, and no shower after a battle -- it was still stingy, but it would look lenient compared to fifteen minutes. And Ender liked having the announcement of the extra fifteen minutes come from the toon leaders. Let the boys learn that leniency comes from their toon leaders, and harshness from their commander -- it will bind them better in the small, tight knots of this fabric.

Ender ate no breakfast. He wasn't hungry. Instead he went to the bathroom and showered, putting his flash suit in the cleaner so it would be ready when he was dried off. He washed himself twice and let the water run and run on him. It would all be recycled. Let everybody drink some of my sweat today. They had given him an untrained army, and he had won, and not just nip and tuck, either. He had won with only six frozen or disabled. Let's see how long other commanders keep using their formations now that they've seen what a flexible strategy can do.

He was floating in the middle of the battleroom when his soldiers began to arrive. No one spoke to him, of course. He would speak, they knew, when he was ready, and not before.

When all were there, Ender hooked himself near them and looked at them, one by one. “Good first battle,” he said, which was excuse enough for a cheer, and an attempt to start a chant of Dragon, Dragon, which he quickly stopped. "Dragon Army did all right against the Rabbits. But the enemy isn't always going to be that bad. If that had been a good army, C toon, your approach was so slow they would have had you from the flanks before you got into good position. You should have split and angled in from two directions, so they couldn't flank you. A and E, your aim was wretched. The tallies show that you averaged only one hit for every two soldiers. That means most of the hits were made by attacking soldiers close in. That can't go on -- a competent enemy would cut up the assault force unless they have much better cover from the soldiers at a distance. I want every toon to work on distance marksmanship at moving and unmoving targets. Half-toons take turns being targets. I'll thaw the flash suits every three minutes. Now move.”

“Will we have any stars to work with?” asked Hot Soup. "To steady our aim?”

"I don't want you to get used to having something to steady your arms. If your arm isn't steady, freeze your elbows! Now move!”

The toon leaders quickly got things going, and Ender moved from group to group to make suggestions and help soldiers who were having particular trouble. The soldiers knew by now that Ender could be brutal in the way he talked to groups, but when he worked with an individual he was always patient, explaining as often as necessary, making suggestions quietly, listening to questions and problems and explanations. But he never laughed when they tried to banter with him, and they soon stopped trying. He was commander every moment they were together. He never had to remind them of it; he simply was.

They worked all day with the taste of victory in their mouths, and cheered again when they broke half an hour early for lunch. Ender held the toon leaders until the regular lunch hour, to talk about the tactics they had used and evaluate the work of their individual soldiers. Then he went to his own room and methodically changed into his uniform for lunch. He would enter the commanders' mess about ten minutes late. Exactly the timing that he wanted. Since this was his first victory, he had never seen the inside of the commanders' mess hall and had no idea what new commanders were expected to do, but he did know that he wanted to enter last today, when the scores of the morning's battles were already posted. Dragon Army will not be an obscure name now.

There was no great stir when he came in. But when some of them noticed how small he was, and saw the Dragons on the sleeves of the uniform, they stared at him openly, and by the time he got his food and sat at a table, the room was silent. Ender began to eat, slowly and carefully, pretending not to notice that he was the center of attention. Gradually conversation and noise started up again, and Ender could relax enough to look around.

One entire wall of the room was a scoreboard. Soldiers were kept aware of an army's overall record for the past two years; in here, however, records were kept for each commander. A new commander couldn't inherit a good standing from his predecessor -- he was ranked according to what he had done.

Ender had the best ranking. A perfect won-lost record, of course, but in the other categories he was far ahead. Average soldiers-disabled, average enemy-disabled, average time-elapsed-before-victory -- in every category he was ranked first.

When he was nearly through eating, someone came up behind him and touched his shoulder.

“Mind if I sit?” Ender didn't have to turn around to know it was Dink Meeker.

“Ho Dink,” said Ender. "Sit.”

“You gold-plated fart,” said Dink cheerfully, "We're all trying to decide whether your scores up there are a miracle or a mistake.”

“A habit,” said Ender.

“One victory is not a habit,” Dink said. "Don't get cocky. When you're new they seed you against weak commanders.”

“Carn Carby isn't exactly on the bottom of the rankings.” It was true, Carby was just about in the middle.

“He's OK,” Dink said, "considering that he only just started. Shows some promise. You don't show promise. You show threat.”

"Threat to what? Do they feed you less if I win? I thought you told me this was all a stupid game and none of it mattered.”

Dink didn't like having his words thrown back at him, not under these circumstances. "You were the one who got me playing along with them. But I'm not playing games with you, Ender. You won't beat me.”

“Probably not,” Ender said.

“I taught you,” Dink said.

“Everything I know,” said Ender. "I'm just playing it by ear right now.

“Congratulations,” said Dink.

“It's good to know I have a friend here.” But Ender wasn't sure Dink was his friend anymore. Neither was Dink. After a few empty sentences, Dink went back to his table.

Ender looked around when he was through with his meal. There were quite a few small conversations going on. Ender spotted Bonzo, who was now one of the oldest commanders. Rose the Nose had graduated. Petra was with a group in a far corner, and she didn't look at him once. Since most of the others stole glances at him from time to time, including the ones Petra was talking with, Ender was pretty sure she was deliberately avoiding his glance. That's the

problem with winning right from the start, thought Ender. You lose friends.

Give them a few weeks to get used to it. By the time I have my next battle, things will have calmed down in here.

Carn Carby made a point of coming to greet Ender before the lunch period ended. It was, again, a gracious gesture, and, unlike Dink, Carby did not seem wary. “Right now I'm in disgrace,” he said frankly. "They won't believe me when I tell them you did things that nobody's ever seen before. So I hope you beat the snot out of the next army you fight. As a favor to me.”

“As a favor to you,” Ender said. "And thanks for talking to me.”

"I think they're treating you pretty badly. Usually new commanders are cheered when they first join the mess. But then, usually a new commander has had a few defeats under his belt before he first makes it in here. I only got in here a month ago. If anybody deserves a cheer, it's you. But that's life. Make them eat dust.”

“I'll try.” Carn Carby left, and Ender mentally added him to his private list of people who also qualified as human beings.

That night, Ender slept better than he had in a long time. Slept so well, in fact, that he didn't wake up until the lights came on. He woke up feeling good, jogged on out to take his shower, and did not notice the piece of paper on his floor until he came back and started dressing in his uniform. He only saw the paper because it moved in the wind as he snapped out the uniform to put it on. He picked up the paper and read it.

PETRA ARKANIAN, PHOENIX ARMY, 0700

It was his old army, the one he had left less than four weeks before, and he knew their formations backward and forward. Partly because of Ender's influence, they were the most flexible of armies, responding relatively quickly to new situations. Phoenix Army would be the best able to cope with Ender's fluid, unpatterned attack. The teachers were determined to make life interesting for him.

0700, said the paper, and it was already 0630. Some of his boys might already be heading for breakfast. Ender tossed his uniform aside, grabbed his flash suit, and in a moment stood in the doorway of his army's barracks.

"Gentlemen, I hope you learned something yesterday, because today we're doing it again."

It took a moment for them to realize that he meant a battle, not a practice. It had to be a mistake, they said. Nobody ever had battles two days in a row.

He handed the paper to Fly Molo, the leader of A toon, who immediately shouted "Flash suits" and started changing clothes.

"Why didn't you tell us earlier?" demanded Hot Soup. Hot had a way of asking Ender questions that nobody else dared ask.

"I thought you needed the shower," Ender said. "Yesterday Rabbit Army claimed we only won because the stink knocked them out."

The soldiers who heard him laughed.

"Didn't find the paper till you got back from the showers, right?"

Ender looked for the source of the voice. It was Bean, already in his flash suit, looking insolent. Time to repay old humiliations, is that it, Bean?

"Of course," Ender said, contemptuously. "I'm not as close to the floor as you are.

More laughter. Bean flushed with anger.

"It's plain we can't count on old ways of doing things." Ender said. "So you'd better plan on battles anytime. And often. I can't pretend I like the way they're screwing around with us, but I do like one thing -- that I've got an army that can handle it."

After that, if he had asked them to follow him to the moon without space suits, they would have done it.

Petra was not Carn Carby; she had more flexible patterns and responded much more quickly to Ender's darting, improvised, unpredictable attack. As a result, Ender had three boys flashed and nine disabled at the end of the battle. Petra was not gracious about bowing over his hand at the end, either. The anger in her eyes seemed to say, I was your friend, and you humiliate me like this?

Ender pretended not to notice her fury. He figured that after a few more battles, she'd realize that in fact she had scored more hits against him than he expected anyone ever would again. And he was still learning from her. In practice today he would teach his toon leaders how to counter the tricks Petra had played on them. Soon they would be friends again.

He hoped.

At the end of the week Dragon Army had fought seven battles in seven days. The score stood 7 wins and 0 losses. Ender had never had more losses than in the battle with Phoenix Army, and in two battles he had suffered not one soldier frozen or disabled. No one believed anymore that it was a fluke that put him first in the standings. He had beaten top armies by unheard-of margins. It was no longer possible for the other commanders to ignore him. A few of them sat with him at every meal, carefully trying to learn from him how he had defeated his most recent opponents. He told them freely, confident that few of them would know how to train their soldiers and their toon leaders to duplicate what his could do. And while Ender talked with a few commanders, much larger groups gathered around the opponents Ender had defeated, trying to find out how Ender might be beaten.

There were many who hated him. Hated him for being young, for being excellent, for having made their victories look paltry and weak. Ender saw it first in their faces when he passed them in the corridors; then he began to notice that some boys would get up in a group and move to another table if he sat near them in the commanders' mess; and there began to be elbows that accidentally jostled him in the game room, feet that got entangled with his when he walked into and out of the gym, spittle and wads of wet paper that struck him from behind as he jogged through the corridors. They couldn't beat him in the battleroom, and knew it -- so instead they would attack him where it was safe, where he was not a giant but just a little boy. Ender despised them, but secretly, so secretly that he didn't even know it himself, he feared them. It was just such little torments that Peter had always used, and Ender was beginning to feel far too much at home.

These annoyances were petty, though, and Ender persuaded himself to accept them as another form of praise. Already the other armies were beginning to imitate Ender. Now most soldiers attacked with knees tucked under them; formations were breaking up now, and more commanders were sending out toons to slip along the walls. None had caught on yet to Ender's five-toon organization -- it gave him the slight advantage that when they had accounted for the

movements of four units, they wouldn't be looking for a fifth.

Ender was teaching them all about null gravity tactics. But where could Ender go to learn new things?

He began to use the video room, filled with propaganda vids about Mazer Rackham and other great commanders of the forces of humanity in the First and Second Invasion. Ender stopped the general practice an hour early, and allowed his toon leaders to conduct their own practice in his absence. Usually they staged skirmishes, toon against toon. Ender stayed long enough to see that things were going well, then left to watch the old battles.

Most of the vids were a waste of time. Heroic music, closeups of commanders and medal-winning soldiers, confused shots of marines invading bugger installations. But here and there he found useful sequences: ships, like points of light, maneuvering in the dark of space, or, better still, the lights on shipboard plotting screens, showing the whole of a battle. It was hard, from the videos, to see all three dimensions, and the scenes were often short and unexplained. But Ender began to see how well the buggers used seemingly random flight paths to create confusion, how they used decoys and false retreats to draw the I.F. ships into traps. Some battles had been cut into many scenes, which were scattered through the various videos; by watching them in sequence, Ender was able to reconstruct whole battles. He began to see things that the official commentators never mentioned. They were always trying to arouse pride in human accomplishments and loathing of the buggers, but Ender began to wonder how humanity had won at all. Human ships were sluggish; fleets responded to new circumstances unbearably slowly, while the bugger fleet seemed to act in perfect unity, responding to each challenge instantly. Of course, in the First Invasion the human ships were completely unsuited to fast combat, but then so were the bugger ships; it was only in the Second Invasion that the ships and weapons were swift and deadly.

So it was from the buggers, not the humans, that Ender learned strategy. He felt ashamed and afraid of learning from them, since they were the most terrible enemy, ugly and murderous and loathsome. But they were also very good at what they did. To a point. They always seemed to follow one basic strategy only -- gather the greatest number of ships at the key point of conflict. They never did anything surprising, anything that seemed to show either brilliance or stupidity in

a subordinate officer. Discipline was apparently very tight.

And there was one oddity. There was plenty of talk about Mazer Rackham but precious little video of his actual battle. Some scenes from early in the battle, Rackham's tiny force looking pathetic against the vast power of the main bugger fleet. The buggers had already beaten the main human fleet out in the comet shield, wiping out the earliest starships and making a mockery of human attempts at high strategy -- that film was often shown, to arouse again and again the agony and terror of bugger victory. Then the fleet coming to Mazer Rackham's little force near Saturn, the hopeless odds, and then--

Then one shot from Mazer Rackham's little cruiser, one enemy ship blowing up. That's all that was ever shown. Lots of film showing marines carving their way into bugger ships. Lots of bugger corpses lying around inside. But no film of buggers killing in personal combat, unless it was spliced in from the First Invasion. It frustrated Ender that Maser Rackham's victory was so obviously censored. Students in the Battle School had much to learn from Mazer Rackham, and everything about his victory was concealed from view. The passion for secrecy was not very helpful to the children who had to learn to accomplish again what Mazer Rackham had done.

Of course, as soon as word got around that Ender Wiggin was watching the war vids over and over again, the video room began to draw a crowd. Almost all were commanders, watching the same vids Ender watched, pretending they understood why he was watching and what he was getting out of it. Ender never explained anything. Even when he showed seven scenes from the same battle, but from different vids, only one boy asked, tentatively, "Are some of those from the same battle?"

Ender only shrugged, as if it didn't matter.

It was during the last hour of practice on the seventh day, only a few hours after Ender's army had won its seventh battle, that Major Anderson himself came into the video room. He handed a slip of paper to one of the commanders sitting there, and then spoke to Ender. "Colonel Graff wishes to see you in his office immediately."

Ender got up and followed Anderson through the corridors. Anderson palmed the locks that kept students out of the officers' quarters; finally they came to where Graff had taken root on a swivel chair bolted to the steel floor. His

belly spilled over both armrests now, even when he sat upright. Ender tried to remember. Graff hadn't seemed particularly fat at when Ender first met him, only four years ago. Time and tension were not being kind to the administrator of the Battle School.

“Seven days since your first battle, Ender,” said Graff.

Ender did not reply.

"And you've won seven battles, once a day.”

Ender nodded.

"Your scores are unusually high, too.”

Ender blinked.

"To what, commander, do you attribute your remarkable success?”

"You gave me an army that does whatever I can think for it to do.”

"And what have you thought for it to do?”

"We orient downward toward the enemy gate and use our lower legs as a shield. We avoid formations and keep our mobility. It helps that I've got five toons of eight instead of four of ten. Also, our enemies haven't had time to respond effectively to our new techniques, so we keep beating them with the same tricks. That won't hold up for long.”

"So you don't expect to keep winning.”

"Not with the same tricks.”

Graff nodded. "Sit down, Ender.”

Ender and Anderson both sat. Graff looked at Anderson, and Anderson spoke next. "What condition is your army in, fighting so often?”

"They're all veterans now.”

"But how are they doing? Are they tired?”

"If they are, they won't admit it.”

"Are they still alert?”

"You're the ones with the computer games that play with people's minds. You tell me.”

"We know what we know. We want to know what you know.”

"These are very good soldiers, Major Anderson. I'm sure they have limits, but we haven't reached them yet. Some of the newer ones are having trouble because they never really mastered some basic techniques, but they're working hard and improving. What do you want me to say, that they need to rest? Of course they need to rest. They need a couple of weeks off. Their studies are shot to hell, none of us are doing any good in our classes. But you know that, and apparently

you don't care, so why should I?”

Graff and Anderson exchanged glances. "Ender, why are you studying the videos of the bugger wars?”

"To learn strategy, of course.”

"Those videos were created for propaganda purposes. All our strategies have been edited out.”

"I know.”

Graff and Anderson exchanged glances again. Graff drummed on his table. “You don't play the fantasy game anymore,” he said.

Ender didn't answer.

"Tell me why you don't play it.”

"Because I won.”

"You never win everything in that game. There's always more.”

"I won everything.”

"Ender, we want to help you be as happy as possible, but if you--”

"You want to make me the best soldier possible. Go down and look at the standings. Look at the all-time standings. So far you're doing an excellent job with me. Congratulations. Now when are you going to put me up against a good army?”

Graff's set lips turned to a smile, and he shook a little with silent laughter.

Anderson handed Ender a slip of paper. “Now,” he said.

BONZO MADRID, SALAMANDER ARMY, 1200

“That's ten minutes from now,” said Ender. "My army will be in the middle of showering up after practice.”

Graff smiled. "Better hurry, then, boy.”

He got to his army's barracks five minutes later. Most were dressing after their showers; some had already gone to the game room or the video room to wait for lunch. He sent three younger boys to call everyone in, and made everyone else dress for battle as quickly as they could.

“This one's hot and there's no time,” Ender said. "They gave Bonzo notice about twenty minutes ago, and by the time we get to the door they'll have been inside for a good five minutes at least.”

The boys were outraged, complaining loudly in the slang that they usually avoided around the commander. What they doing to us? They be crazy, neh?

"Forget why, we'll worry about that tonight. Are you tired?"

Fly Molo answered. "We worked our butts off in practice today. Not to mention beating the crap out of Ferret Army this morning."

"Same day nobody ever do two battles!" said Crazy Tom.

Ender answered in the same tone. "Nobody ever beat Dragon Army, either. This be your big chance to lose?" Ender's taunting question was the answer to their complaints. Win first, ask questions later.

All of them were back in the room, and most of them were dressed. "Move!" shouted Ender, and they ran along behind him, some of them still dressing when they reached the corridor outside the battleroom. Many of them were panting, a bad sign; they were too tired for this battle. The door was already open. There were no stars at all. Just empty, empty space in a dazzlingly bright room. Nowhere to hide, not even in darkness.

"My heart," said Crazy Tom, "they haven't come out yet, either."

Ender put his hand across his own mouth, to tell them to be silent. With the door open, of course the enemy could hear every word they said. Ender pointed all around the door, to tell them that Salamander Army was undoubtedly deployed against the wall all around the door, where they couldn't be seen but could easily flash anyone who came out.

Ender motioned for them all to back away from the door. Then he pulled forward a few of the taller boys, including Crazy Tom, and made them kneel, not squatting back to sit on their heels, but fully upright, so they formed an L with their bodies. He flashed them. In silence the army watched him. He selected the smallest boy, Bean, handed him Tom's gun, and made Bean kneel on Tom's frozen legs. Then pulled Bean's hands, each holding a gun, through Tom's armpits.

Now the boys understood. Tom was a shield, an armored spacecraft, and Bean was hiding inside. He was certainly not invulnerable, but he would have time.

Ender assigned two more boys to throw Tom and Bean through the door and signaled them to wait. He went on through the army quickly assigning groups of four -- a shield,

a shooter, and two throwers. Then, when all were frozen or armed or ready to throw, he signaled the throwers to pick up their burdens, throw them through the door, and then jump through themselves.

“Move!” shouted Ender.

They moved. Two at a time the shield-pairs went through the door, backwards so that the shield would be between the shooter and the enemy. The enemy opened fire at once, but they mostly hit the frozen boy in front. In the meantime, with two guns to work with and their targets neatly lined up and spread flat along the wall, the Dragons had an easy time of it. It was almost impossible to miss. And as the throwers also jumped through the door, they got handholds on the same wall with the enemy, shooting at a deadly angle so that the Salamanders couldn't figure out whether to shoot at the shield-pairs slaughtering them from above or the throwers shooting at them from their own level. By the time Ender himself came through the door, the battle was over. It hadn't taken a full minute from the time the first Dragon passed through the door until the shooting stopped. Dragon had lost twenty frozen or disabled, and only twelve boys were undamaged. It was their worst score yet, but they had won.

When Major Anderson came out and gave Ender the hook, Ender could not contain his anger. "I thought you were going to put us against an army that could match us in a fair fight.”

"Congratulations on the victory, commander.”

“Bean!” shouted Ender. "If you had commanded Salamander Army, what would you have done?”

Bean, disabled but not completely frozen, called out from where he drifted near the enemy door. "Keep a shifting pattern of movement going in front of the door. You never hold still when the enemy knows exactly where you are.

“As long as you're cheating,” Ender said to Anderson, "why don't you train the other army to cheat intelligently!”

“I suggest that you remobilize your army,” said Anderson.

Ender pressed the buttons to thaw both armies at once. “Dragon Army dismissed!” he shouted immediately. There would be no elaborate formation to accept the surrender of the other army. This had not been a fair fight, even though they had won -- the teachers had meant them to lose, and it was only Bonzo's ineptitude that had saved them. There was

no glory in that.

Only as Ender himself was leaving the battleroom did he realize that Bonzo would not realize that Ender was angry at the teachers. Spanish honor. Bonzo would only know that he had been defeated even when the odds were stacked in his favor; that Ender had had the youngest child in his army publicly state what Bonzo should have done to win; and that Ender had not even stayed to receive Bonzo's dignified surrender. If Bonzo had not already hated Ender he would surely have begun; and hating him as he did, this would surely turn his rage murderous. Bonzo was the last person to strike me, thought Ender. I'm sure he has not forgotten that.

Nor had he forgotten the bloody affair in the battleroom when the older boys tried to break up Ender's practice session. Nor had many others. They were hungry for blood then; Bonzo will be thirsting for it now. Ender toyed with the idea of going back to take advanced personal defense; but with battles now possible not only every day, but twice in the same day, Ender knew he could not spare the time. I'll have to take my chances. The teachers got me into this -- they can keep me safe.

Bean flopped down on his bunk in utter exhaustion -- half the boys in the barracks were already asleep, and it was still fifteen minutes before lights out. Wearily he pulled his desk from its locker and signed on. There was a test tomorrow in geometry and Bean was woefully unprepared. He could always reason things out if he had enough time, and he had read Euclid when he was five, but the test had a time limit so there wouldn't be a chance to think. He had to know. And he didn't know. And he would probably do badly on the test. But they had won twice today, and so he felt good.

As soon as he signed on, however, all thoughts of geometry were banished. A message paraded around the desk:

SEE ME AT ONCE -- ENDER

The time was 2150, only ten minutes before lights out. How long ago had Ender sent it? Still, he'd better not ignore it. There might be another battle in the morning -- the

thought made him weary -- and whatever Ender wanted to talk to him about, there wouldn't be time then. So Bean rolled off the bunk and walked emptily through the corridor to Ender's room. He knocked.

“Come in,” said Ender.

"Just saw your message.”

“Fine,” said Ender.

"It's near lights out.”

"I'll help you find your way in the dark.”

"I just didn't know if you knew what time it was--”

"I always know what time it is.”

Bean sighed inwardly. It never failed. Whenever he had any conversation with Ender, it turned into an argument. Bean hated it. He recognized Ender's genius and honored him for it. Why couldn't Ender ever see anything good in him?

"Remember four weeks ago, Bean? When you told me to make you a toon leader?”

"Eh.”

“I've made five toon leaders and five assistants since then. And none of them was you.” Ender raised his eyebrows. "Was I right?”

"Yes, sir.”

"So tell me how you've done in these eight battles.”

"Today was the first time they disabled me, but the computer listed me as getting eleven hits, before I had to stop. I've never had less than five hits in a battle. I’ve also completed every assignment I've been given.”

"Why did they make you a soldier so young, Bean?”

"No younger than you were.”

"But why?”

"I don't know.”

"Yes you do, and so do I.”

"I've tried to guess, but they're just guesses. You're-- very good. They knew that, they pushed you ahead--”

"Tell me why, Bean.”

“Because they need us, that's why.” Bean sat down on the floor and stared at Enders feet. "Because they need somebody to beat the buggers. That's the only thing they care about.”

"It's important that you know that, Bean. Because most boys in this school think the game is important for itself-- but it isn't. It's only important because it helps them find kids who might grow up to be real commanders, in the real war. But as for the game, screw that. That's what they're doing.

Screwing up the game."

"Funny. I thought they were just doing it to us."

"A game nine weeks earlier than it should have come. A game every day. And now two games in the same day. Bean, I don't know what the teachers are doing, but my army is getting tired, and I'm getting tired, and they don't care at all about the rules of the game. I've pulled the old charts up from the computer. No one has ever destroyed so many enemies and kept so many of his own soldiers whole in the history of the game."

"You're the best, Ender."

Ender shook his head. "Maybe. But it was no accident that I got the soldiers I got. Launchies, rejects from other armies, but put them together and my worst soldier could be a toon leader in another army. They've loaded things my way, but now they're loading it all against me. Bean, they want to break us down."

"They can't break you."

"You'd be surprised." Ender breathed sharply, suddenly, as if there were a stab of pain, or he had to catch a sudden breath in a wind; Bean looked at him and realized that the impossible was happening. Far from baiting him, Ender Wiggin was actually confiding in him. Not much. But a little. Ender was human and Bean had been allowed to see.

"Maybe you'll be surprised," said Bean.

"There's a limit to how many clever new ideas I can come up with every day. Somebody's going to come up with something to throw at me that I haven't thought of before, and I won't be ready."

"What's the worst that could happen? You lose one game."

"Yes. That's the worst that could happen. I can't lose any games. Because if I lose any--"

He didn't explain himself, and Bean didn't ask.

"I need you to be clever, Bean. I need you to think of solutions to problems we haven't seen yet. I want you to try things that no one has ever tried because they're absolutely stupid."

"Why me?"

"Because even though there are some better soldiers than you in Dragon Army -- not many, but some -- there's nobody who can think better and faster than you." Bean said nothing. They both knew it was true.

Ender showed him his desk. On it were twelve names.

Two or three from each toon. “Choose five of these,” said Ender. "One from each toon. They're a special squad, and you'll train them. Only during the extra practice sessions. Talk to me about what you're training them to do. Don't spend too long on any one thing. Most of the time you and your squad will be part of the whole army, part of your regular toons. But when I need you. When there's something to be done that only you can do.”

“These are all new,” said Bean. "No veterans.”

"After last week, Bean, all our soldiers are veterans. Don't you realize that on the individual soldier standings, all forty of our soldiers are in the top fifty? That you have to go down seventeen places to find a soldier who isn't a Dragon?”

"What if I can't think of anything?”

"Then I was wrong about you.”

Bean grinned. "You weren't wrong.”

The lights went out.

"Can you find your way back, Bean?”

"Probably not.”

"Then stay here. If you listen very carefully you can hear the good fairy come in the night and leave our assignment for tomorrow.”

"They won't give us another battle tomorrow, will they?”

Ender didn't answer. Bean heard him climb into bed.

He got up from the floor and did likewise. He thought of a half dozen ideas before he went to sleep. Ender would be pleased -- every one of them was stupid.

Ender's Game

12

Bonzo

"General Pace, please sit down. I understand you have come to me about a matter of some urgency."

"Ordinarily, Colonel Graff, I would not presume to interfere in the internal workings of the Battle School. Your autonomy is guaranteed, and despite our difference in ranks I am quite aware that it is my authority only to advise, not to order, you to take action."

"Action?"

"Do not be disingenuous with me, Colonel Graff. Americans are quite apt at playing stupid when they choose to, but I am not to be deceived. You know why I am here."

"Ah. I guess this means Dap filed a report?"

"He feels paternal toward the students here. He feels your neglect of a potentially lethal situation is more than negligence -- that it borders on conspiracy to cause the death or serious injury of one of the students here."

"This is a school for children, General Pace. Hardly a matter to bring the chief of I.F. military police here for."

"Colonel Graff, the name of Ender Wiggin has percolated through the high command. It has even reached my ears -- I have heard him described modestly as our only hope of victory in the upcoming invasion. When it is his life or health that is in danger, I do not think it untoward that the military police take some interest in preserving and protecting the boy. Do you?"

"Damn Dap and damn you too, sir, I know what I'm doing."

"Do you?"

"Better than anyone else."

"Oh, that is obvious, since nobody else has the faintest idea what you're doing. You have known for eight days that there is a conspiracy among some of the more vicious of these 'children' to cause the beating of Ender Wiggin, if they can. And that some members of this conspiracy, notably the

boy named Bonito de Madrid, commonly called Bonzo, are quite likely to exhibit no self-restraint when this punishment takes place, so that Ender Wiggin, an inestimably important international resource, will be placed in serious danger of having his brains pasted on the walls of your simple orbiting schoolhouse. And you, fully warned of this danger, propose to do exactly--"

"Nothing."

"You can see how this excites our puzzlement."

"Ender Wiggin has been in this situation before. Back on Earth, the day he lost his monitor, and again when a large group of older boys--"

"I did not come here ignorant of the past. Ender Wiggin has provoked Bonzo Madrid beyond human endurance. And you have no military police standing by to break up disturbances. It is unconscionable."

"When Ender Wiggin holds our fleets in his control, when he must make the decisions that bring us victory or destruction, will there be military police to came save him if things get out of hand?"

"I fail to see the connection."

"Obviously. But the connection is there Ender Wiggin must believe that no matter what happens, no adult will ever, ever step in to help him in any way. He must believe, to the core of his soul, that he can only do what he and the other children work out for themselves. If he does not believe that, then he will never reach the peak of his abilities."

"He will also not reach the peak of his abilities if he is dead or permanently crippled."

"He won't be."

"Why don't you simply graduate Bonzo? He's old enough."

"Because Ender knows that Bonzo plans to kill him. If we transfer Bonzo ahead of schedule, he'll know that we saved him. Heaven knows Bonzo isn't a good enough commander to be promoted on merit."

"What about the other children? Getting them to help him?"

"We'll see what happens. That is my first, final, and only decision."

"God help you if you're wrong."

"God help us all if I'm wrong."

"I'll have you before a capital court martial. I'll have your name disgraced throughout the world if you're wrong."

"Fair enough. But do remember if I happen to be right to make sure I get a few dozen medals."

"For what?"

"For keeping you from meddling."

Ender sat in a corner of the battleroom, his arm hooked through a handhold watching Bean practice with his squad. Yesterday they had worked on attacks without guns, disarming enemies with their feet. Ender had helped them with some techniques from gravity personal combat -- many things had to be changed, but inertia in flight was a tool that could be used against the enemy as easily in nullo as in Earth gravity.

Today, though, Bean had a new toy. It was a deadline, one of the thin, almost invisible twines used during construction in space to hold two objects together. Deadlines were sometimes kilometers long. This one was just a bit longer than a wall of the battleroom and yet it looped easily, almost invisibly, around Bean's wrist. He pulled it off like an article of clothing and handed one end to one of his soldiers. "Hook it to a handhold and wind it around a few times." Bean carried the other end across the battleroom.

As a tripwire it wasn't too useful, Bean decided. It was invisible enough, but one strand of twine wouldn't have much chance of stopping an enemy that could easily go above or below it. Then he got the idea of using it to change his direction of movement in midair. He fastened it around his waist, the other end still fastened to a handhold, slipped a few meters away, and launched himself straight out. The twine caught him, changed his direction abruptly, and swung him in an arc that crashed him brutally against the wall.

He screamed and screamed. It took Ender a moment to realize that he wasn't screaming in pain. "Did you see how fast I went! Did you see how I changed direction!"

Soon all of Dragon Army stopped work to watch Bean practice with the twine. The changes in direction were stunning, especially when you didn't know where to look for the twine, When he used the twine to wrap himself around a star, he attained speeds no one had ever seen before.

It was 2140 when Ender dismissed the evening practice. Weary but delighted at having seen something new, his army walked through the corridors back to the barracks. Ender walked among them, not talking, but listening to their talk. They were tired, yes -- a battle every day for more than four

weeks, often in situations that tested their abilities to the utmost. But they were proud, happy, close -- they had never lost, and they had learned to trust each other. Trust their fellow soldiers to fight hard and well; trust their leaders to use them rather than waste their efforts; above all trust Ender to prepare them for anything and everything that might happen.

As they walked the corridor, Ender noticed several older boys seemingly engaged in conversations in branching corridors and ladderways; some were in their corridor, walking slowly in the other direction. It became too much of a coincidence, however, that so many of them were wearing Salamander uniforms, and that those who weren't were often older boys belonging to armies whose commanders most hated Ender Wiggin. A few of them looked at him, and looked away too quickly; others were too tense, too nervous as they pretended to be relaxed. What will I do if they attack my army here in the corridor? My boys are all young, all small, and completely untrained in gravity combat. When would they learn?

“Ho, Ender!” someone called. Ender stopped and looked back, It was Petra. "Ender, can I talk to you?”

Ender saw in a moment that if he stopped and talked, his army would quickly pass him by and he would be alone with Petra in the hallway. “Walk with me,” Ender said.

"It's just for a moment.”

Ender turned around and walked on with his army. He heard Petra running to catch up. “All right, I'll walk with you.” Ender tensed when she came near. Was she one of them, one of the ones who hated him enough to hurt him?

"A friend of yours wanted me to warn you. There are some boys who want to kill you.”

“Surprise,” said Ender. Some of his soldiers seemed to perk up at this. Plots against their commander were interesting news, it seemed.

"Ender, they can do it. He said they've been planning it ever since you went commander.”

"Ever since I beat Salamander, you mean.”

"I hated you after you beat Phoenix Army, too, Ender.”

"I didn't say I blamed anybody.”

"It's true. He told me to take you aside today and warn you, on the way back from the battleroom, to be careful tomorrow because--”

"Petra, if you had actually taken me aside just now,

there are about a dozen boys following along who would have taken me in the corridor. Can you tell me you didn't notice them?"

Suddenly her face flushed. "No. I didn't. How can you think I did? Don't you know who your friends are?" She pushed her way through Dragon Army, got ahead of him, and scrambled up a ladderway to a higher deck.

"Is it true?" asked Crazy Tom.

"Is what true?" Ender scanned the room and shouted for two roughhousing boys to get to bed.

"That some of the older boys want to kill you?"

"All talk," said Ender. But he knew that it wasn't. Petra had known something, and what he saw on the way here tonight wasn't imagination.

"It may be all talk, but I hope you'll understand when I say you've got five toon leaders who are going to escort you to your room tonight."

"Completely unnecessary."

"Humor us. You owe us a favor."

"I owe you nothing." He'd be a fool to turn them down. "Do as you want." He turned and left. The toon leaders trotted along with him. One ran ahead and opened his door. They checked the room, made Ender promise to lock it, and left him just before lights out.

There was a message on his desk.

DON'T BE ALONE. EVER. -- DINK

Ender grinned. So Dink was still his friend. Don't worry. They won't do anything to me. I have my army.

But in the darkness he did not have his army. He dreamed that night of Stilson, only he saw now how small Stilson was, only six years old, how ridiculous his tough-guy posturing was; and yet in the dream Stilson and his friends tied Ender so he couldn't fight back, and then everything that Ender had done to Stilson in life, they did to Ender in the dream. And afterward Ender saw himself babbling like an idiot, trying hard to give orders to his army, but all his words came out as nonsense.

He awoke in darkness, and he was afraid. Then he calmed himself by remembering that the teachers obviously valued him, or they wouldn't be putting so much pressure on him; they wouldn't let anything happen to him, nothing bad, anyway. Probably when the older kids attacked him in the

battleroom years ago, there were teachers just outside the room, waiting to see what would happen; if things had got out of hand, they would have stepped in and stopped it. I probably could have sat here and done nothing, and they would have seen to it I came through all right. They'll push me as hard as they can in the game, but outside the game they'll keep me safe.

With that assurance, he slept again, until the door opened softly and the morning's war was left on the floor for him to find.

They won, of course, but it was a grueling affair, with the battleroom so filled with a labyrinth of stars that hunting down the enemy during mop-up took forty-five minutes. It was Pol Slattery's Badger Army, and they refused to give up. There was a new wrinkle in the game, too -- when they disabled or damaged an enemy, he thawed in about five minutes, the way it worked in practice. Only when the enemy was completely frozen did he stay out of action the whole time. But the gradual thawing did not work for Dragon Army. Crazy Tom was the one who realized what was happening, when they started getting hit from behind by people they thought were safely out of the way. And at the end of the battle, Slattery shook Ender's hand and said, "I'm glad you won. If I ever beat you, Ender, I want to do it fair."

"Use what they give you," Ender said. "If you've ever got an advantage over the enemy, use it."

"Oh, I did," said Slattery. He grinned. "I'm only fair-minded before and after battles."

The battle took so long that breakfast was over. Ender looked at his hot, sweating, tired soldiers waiting in the corridor and said, "Today you know everything. No practice. Get some rest. Have some fun. Pass a test." It was a measure of their weariness that they didn't even cheer or laugh or smile, just walked into the barracks and stripped off their clothes. They would have practiced if he had asked them to, but they were reaching the end of their strength, and going without breakfast was one unfairness too many.

Ender meant to shower right away, but he was also tired. He lay down on his bed in his flash suit, just for a moment, and woke up at the beginning of lunchtime. So much for his idea of studying more about the buggers this

morning. Just time to clean up, go eat, and head for class.

He peeled off his flash suit, which stank from his sweat. His body felt cold, his joints oddly weak. Shouldn't have slept in the middle of the day. I'm beginning to slack off. I'm beginning to wear down. Can't let it get to me.

So he jogged to the gym and forced himself to climb the rope three times before going to the bathroom to shower. It didn't occur to him that his absence in the commanders' mess would be noticed, that showering during the noon hour, when his own army would be wolfing down their first meal of the day, he would he completely, helplessly alone.

Even when he heard them come into the bathroom he paid no attention. He was letting the water pour over his head, over his body; the muffled sound of footsteps was hardly noticeable. Maybe lunch was over, he thought. He started to soap himself again. Maybe somebody finished practice late.

And maybe not. He turned around, There were seven of them, leaning back against the metal sinks or standing closer to the showers, watching him. Bonzo stood in front of them, Many were smiling, the condescending leer of the hunter for his cornered victim. Bonzo was not smiling, however.

“Ho,” Ender said.

Nobody answered.

So Ender turned off the shower even though there was still soap on him, and reached for his towel. It wasn't there. One of the boys was holding it. It was Bernard. All it would take for the picture to be complete was for Stilson and Peter to be there, too. They needed Peter's smile; they needed Stilson's obvious stupidity.

Ender recognized the towel as their opening point. Nothing would make him look weaker than to chase naked after the towel. That was what they wanted, to humiliate him, to break him down. He wasn't going to play. He refused to feel weak because he was wet and cold and unclothed. He stood strongly, facing them, his arms at his sides. He fastened his gaze on Bonzo.

“Your move,” Ender said.

“This is no game,” said Bernard. "We're tired of you, Ender. You graduate today. On ice.”

Ender did not look at Bernard. It was Bonzo who hungered for his death, even though he was silent. The others were along for the ride, daring themselves to see how far they might go. Bonzo knew how far he would go.

“Bonzo,” Ender said softly. "Your father would be proud of you.”

Bonzo stiffened.

"He would love to see you now, come to fight a naked boy in a shower, smaller than you, and you brought six friends. He would say, Oh, what honor.”

“Nobody came to fight you,” said Bernard, "We just came to talk you into playing fair with the games. Maybe lose a couple now and then.”

The others laughed, but Bonzo didn't laugh, and neither did Ender.

"Be proud, Bonito, pretty boy. You can go home and tell your father, Yes, I beat up Ender Wiggin, who was barely ten years old, and I was thirteen. And I had only six of my friends to help me, and somehow we managed to defeat him, even though he was naked and wet and alone -- Ender Wiggin is so dangerous and terrifying it was all we could do not to bring two hundred.”

“Shut your mouth, Wiggin,” said one of the boys.

“We didn't come to hear the little bastard talk,” said another.

“You shut up,” said Bonzo. “Shut up and stand out of the way.” He began to take off his uniform. “Naked and wet and alone, Ender, so we're even. I can't help that I'm bigger than you. You're such a genius, you figure out how to handle me.” He turned to the others. "Watch the door. Don't let anyone else in.”

The bathroom wasn't large, and plumbing fixtures protruded everywhere, It had been launched in one piece, as a low-orbit satellite, packed full of the water reclamation equipment; it was designed to have no wasted space. It was obvious what their tactics would have to be. Throw the other boy against fixtures until one of them does enough damage that he stops.

When Ender saw Bonzo's stance, his heart sank. Bonzo had also taken classes. And probably more recently than Ender. His reach was better, he was stronger, and he was full of hate. He would not be gentle. He will go for my head, thought Ender. He will try above all to damage my brain. And if this fight is long, he's bound to win. His strength can control me. If I'm to walk away from here, I have to win quickly, and permanently. He could feel again the sickening way that Stilson's bones had given way. But this time it will be my body that breaks, unless I can break him first.

Ender stepped back, flipped the showerhead so it turned outward, and turned on pure hot water. Almost at once the steam began to rise. He turned on the next and the next.

“I'm not afraid of hot water,” said Bonzo. His voice was soft.

But it wasn't the hot water that Ender wanted. It was the heat. His body still had soap on it, and his sweat moistened it, made his skin more slippery than Bonzo would expect.

Suddenly there was a voice from the door. “Stop it!” For a moment Ender thought it was a teacher, come to stop the fight, but it was only Dink Meeker. Bonzo's friends caught him at the door held him. “Stop it, Bonzo!” Dink cried. "Don't hurt him!”

“Why not?” asked Bonzo, and for the first time he smiled. Ah, thought Ender, he loves to have someone recognize that he is the one in control, that he has power.

"Because he's the best, that's why! Who else can fight the buggers! That's what matters, you fool, the buggers!”

Bonzo stopped smiling. It was the thing he hated most about Ender, that Ender really mattered to other people, and in the end, Bonzo did not. You've killed me with those words, Dink. Bonzo doesn't want to hear that I might save the world.

Where are the teachers? thought Ender. Don't they realize that the first contact between us in this fight might be the end of it? This isn't like the fight in the battleroom, where no one had the leverage to do any terrible damage. There's gravity in here, and the floor and walls are hard and jutted with metal. Stop this now or not at all.

“If you touch him you're a buggerlover!” cried Dink. “You're a traitor, if you touch him you deserve to die!” They jammed Dink's face backward into the door and he was silent.

The mist from the showers dimmed the room, and the sweat was streaming down Ender's body. Now, before the soap is carried off me. Now, while I'm still too slippery to hold.

Ender stepped back, letting the fear he felt show in his face. “Bonzo, don't hurt me,” he said. "Please.”

It was what Bonzo was waiting for, the confession that he was in power. For other boys it might have been enough that Ender had submitted; for Bonzo, it was only a sign that his victory was sure. He swung his leg as if to kick, but changed it to a leap at the last moment. Ender noticed the shifting weight and stooped lower, so that Bonzo would be

more off-balance when he tried to grab Ender and throw him.

Bonzo's tight, hard ribs came against Ender's face, and his hands slapped against his back, trying to grip him. But Ender twisted, and Bonzo's hands slipped. In an instant Ender was completely turned, yet still inside Bonzo's grasp. The classic move at this moment would be to bring up his heel into Bonzo's crotch, but for that move to be effective required too much accuracy, and Bonzo expected it. He was already rising onto his toes, thrusting his hips backward to keep Ender from reaching his groin. Without seeing him, Ender knew it would bring his face closer, almost in Ender's hair; so instead of kicking he lunged upward off the floor, with the powerful lunge of the soldier bounding from the wall, and jammed his head into Bonzo's face.

Ender whirled in time to see Bonzo stagger backward, his nose bleeding, gasping from surprise and pain. Ender knew that at this moment he might be able to walk out of the room and end the battle. The way he had escaped from the battleroom after drawing blood. But the battle would only be fought again. Again and again until the will to fight was finished. The only way to end things completely was to hurt Bonzo enough that his fear was stronger than his hate.

So Ender leaned back against the wall behind him, then jumped up and pushed off with his arms. His feet landed in Bonzo's belly and chest. Ender spun in the air and landed on his toes and hands; he flipped over, scooted under Bonzo, and this time when he kicked upward into Bonzo's crotch, he connected, hard and sure.

Bonzo did not cry out in pain. He did not react at all, except that his body rose a little in the air. It was as if Ender had kicked a piece of furniture. Bonzo collapsed, fell to the side, and sprawled directly under the spray of streaming water from a shower. He made no movement whatever to escape the murderous heat.

“My God!” someone shouted. Bonzo's friends leaped to turn off the water. Ender slowly rose to his feet. Someone thrust his towel at him. It was Dink. “Come on out of here,” Dink said. He led Ender away. Behind them they heard the heavy clatter of adults running down a ladderway. Now the teachers would come. The medical staff. To dress the wounds of Ender's enemy. Where were they before the fight, when there might have been no wounds at all?

There was no doubt now in Ender's mind. There was no help for him. Whatever he faced, now and forever, no one

would save him from it. Peter might be scum, but Peter had been right, always right; the power to cause pain is the only power that matters, the power to kill and destroy, because if you can't kill then you are always subject to those who can, and nothing and no one will ever save you.

Dink led him to his room, made him lie on the bed. “Are you hurt anywhere?” he asked,

Ender shook his head.

"You took him apart. I thought you were dead meat, the way he grabbed you. But you took him apart. If he'd stood up longer, you would've killed him.”

"He meant to kill me.”

"I know it. I know him. Nobody hates like Bonzo. But not anymore. If they don't ice him for this and send him home, he'll never look you in the eye again. You or anybody. He had twenty centimeters on you, and you made him look like a crippled cow standing there chewing her cud.”

All Ender could see, though, was the way Bonzo looked as Ender kicked upward into his groin. The empty, dead look in his eyes. He was already finished then. Already unconscious. His eyes were open, but he wasn't thinking or moving anymore, just that dead, stupid look on his lace, that terrible look, the way Stilson looked when I finished with him.

“They'll ice him, though,” Dink said. "Everybody knows he started it. I saw them get up and leave the commanders' mess. Took me a couple of seconds to realize you weren't there, either, and then a minute more to find out where you had gone. I told you not to be alone.”

"Sorry.”

"They're bound to ice him. Troublemaker. Him and his stinking honor.”

Then, to Dink's surprise, Ender began to cry. Lying on his back, still soaking wet with sweat and water, he gasped his sobs, tears seeping out of his closed eyelids and disappearing in the water on his face.

"Are you all right?”

“I didn't want to hurt him!” Ender cried. "Why didn't he just leave me alone!”

He heard his door open softly, then close. He knew at

once that it was his battle instructions, He opened his eyes, expecting to find the darkness of early morning, before 0600. Instead, the lights were on, He was naked and when he moved the bed was soaking wet, His eyes were puffy and painful from crying. He looked at the clock on his desk. 1820, it said. It's the same day. I already had a battle today, I had two battles today -- the bastards know what I've been through, and they're doing this to me.

WILLIAM BEE, GRIFFIN ARMY,
TALO MOMOE, TIGER ARMY, 1900

He sat on the edge of the bed. The note trembled in his hand. I can't do this, he said silently. And then not silently. "I can't do this."

He got up, bleary, and looked for his flash suit. Then he remembered -- he had put it in the cleaner while he showered. It was still there.

Holding the paper, he walked out of his room. Dinner was nearly over, and there were a few people in the corridor, but no one spoke to him, just watched him, perhaps in awe of what had happened at noon in the bathroom, perhaps because of the forbidding, terrible look on his face. Most of his boys were in the barracks.

Ho, Ender. There gonna be a practice tonight?

Ender handed the paper to Hot Soup. "Those sons of bitches," he said. "Two at once?"

"Two armies!" shouted Crazy Tom.

"They'll just trip over each other," said Bean.

"I've got to clean up," Ender said. "Get them ready, get everybody together, I'll meet you there, at the gate."

He walked out of the barracks. A tumult of conversation rose behind him. He heard Crazy Tom scream, "Two farteating armies! We'll whip their butts!"

The bathroom was empty. All cleaned up. None of the blood that poured from Bonzo's nose into the shower water. All gone. Nothing bad ever happened here.

Ender stepped under the water and rinsed himself, took the sweat of combat and let it run down the drain. All gone, except they recycled it and we'll be drinking Bonzo's bloodwater in the morning. All the life gone out of it, but his blood just the same, his blood and my sweat, washed down in their stupidity or cruelty or whatever it was that made them let it happen.

He dried himself, dressed in his flash suit, and walked to the battleroom. His army was waiting in the corridor, the door still not opened. They watched him in silence as he walked to the front to stand by the blank grey forcefield. Of course they all knew about his fight in the bathroom today; that and their own weariness from the battle that morning kept them quiet, while the knowledge that they would be facing two armies filled them with dread.

Everything they can do to beat me, thought Ender. Everything they can think of, change all the rules, they don't care, just so they beat me. Well, I'm sick of the game. No game is worth Bonzo's blood pinking the water on the bathroom floor. Ice me, send me home, I don't want to play anymore.

The door disappeared. Only three meters out there were four stars together, completely blocking the view from the door.

Two armies weren't enough. They had to make Ender deploy his forces blind.

“Bean,” said Ender. "Take your boys and tell me what's on the other side of this star.”

Bean pulled the coil of twine from his waist, tied one end around him, handed the other end to a boy in his squad, and stepped gently through the door. His squad quickly followed. They had practiced this several times, and it took only a moment before they were braced on the star, holding the end of the twine. Bean pushed off at great speed, in a line almost parallel to the door; when he reached the corner of the room, he pushed off again and rocketed straight out toward the enemy. The spots of light on the wall showed that the enemy was shooting at him. As the rope was stopped by each edge of the star in turn, his arc became tighter, his direction changed, and he became an impossible target to hit. His squad caught him neatly as he came around the star from the other side. He moved all his arms and legs so those waiting inside the door would know that the enemy hadn't flashed him anywhere.

Ender dropped through the gate.

“It's really dim,” said Bean, "but light enough you can't follow people easily by the lights on their suits. Worst possible for seeing. It's all open space from this star to the enemy side of the room. They've got eight stars making a square around their door. I didn't see anybody except the ones peeking around the boxes. They're just sitting there

waiting for us.”

As if to corroborate Bean's statement, the enemy began to call out to them. "Hey! We be hungry, come and feed us! Your ass is draggin'! Your ass is Dragon!”

Ender's mind felt dead. This was stupid. He didn't have a chance, outnumbered two to one and forced to attack a protected enemy. "In a real war, any commander with brains at all would retreat and save his army.”

“What the hell,” said Bean. "It's only a game.”

"It stopped being a game when they threw away the rules.”

"So, you throw 'em away, too.”

Ender grinned. "OK. Why not, Let's see how they react to a formation.”

Bean was appalled. "A formation! We've never done a formation in the whole time we've been an army!”

“We've still got a month to go before our training period is normally supposed to end. About time we started doing formations. Always have to know formations,” He formed an A with his fingers, showed it to the blank door, and beckoned, A toon quickly emerged and Ender began arranging them behind the star. Three meters wasn't enough room to work in, the boys were frightened and confused, and it took nearly five minutes just to get them to understand what they were doing.

Tiger and Griffin soldiers were reduced to chanting catcalls, while their commanders argued about whether to try to use their overwhelming force to attack Dragon Army while they were still behind the star. Momoe was all for attacking -- “We outnumber him two to one” -- while Bee said, "Sit tight and we can't lose, move out and he can figure out a way to beat us.”

So they sat tight, until finally in the dusky light they saw a large mass slip out from behind Ender's star. It held its shape, even when it abruptly stopped moving sideways and launched itself toward the dead center of the eight stars where eighty-two soldiers waited.

“Doobie doe,” said a Griffin. "They're doing a formation.”

“They must have been putting that together for all five minutes,” said Momoe. "If we'd attacked while they were doing it, we could've destroyed them.”

“Eat it, Momoe,” whispered Bee. "You saw the way that little kid flew. He went all the way around the star and back

behind without ever touching a wall. Maybe they've all got hooks, did you think of that? They've got something new there."

The formation was a strange one. A square formation of tightly-packed bodies in front, making a wall. Behind it, a cylinder, six boys in circumference and two boys deep, their limbs outstretched and frozen so they couldn't possibly be holding on to each other. Yet they held together as tightly as if they had been tied -- which, in fact, they were.

From inside the formation, Dragon Army was firing with deadly accuracy, forcing Griffins and Tigers to stay tightly packed on their stars.

"The back of that sucker is open," said Bee. "As soon as they get between the stars, we can get around behind--"

"Don't talk about it, do it!" said Momoe. Then he took his own advice and ordered his boys to launch against the wall and rebound out behind the Dragon formation.

In the chaos of their takeoff, while Griffin Army held tight to their stars, the Dragon formation abruptly changed. Both the cylinder and the front wall split in two, as boys inside it pushed off; almost at once, the formations also reversed direction, heading back toward the Dragon gate. Most of the Griffins fired at the formations and the boys moving backward with them; and the Tigers took the survivors of Dragon Army from behind.

But there was something wrong. William Bee thought for a moment and realized what it was. Those formations couldn't have reversed direction in midflight unless someone pushed off in the opposite direction, and if they took off with enough force to make that twenty-man formation move backward, they must be going fast.

There they were, six small Dragon soldiers down near William Bee's own door. From the number of lights showing on their flash suits, Bee could see that three of them were disabled and two of them damaged; only one was whole. Nothing to be frightened of. Bee casually aimed at them, pressed the button, and--

Nothing happened.

The lights went on.

The game was over.

Even though he was looking right at them, it took Bee a moment to realize what had just happened. Four of the Dragon soldiers had their helmets pressed on the corners of the door. And one of them had just passed through. They had

just carried out the victory ritual. They were getting destroyed, they had hardly inflicted any casualties, and they had the gall to perform the victory ritual and end the game right under their noses.

Only then did it occur to William Bee that not only had Dragon Army ended the game, it was possible that, under the rules, they had won it. After all, no matter what happened, you were not certified as the winner unless you had enough unfrozen soldiers to touch the corners of the gate and pass someone through into the enemy's corridor. Therefore, by one way of thinking, you could argue that the ending ritual was victory. The battleroom certainly recognized it as the end of the game.

The teachergate opened and Major Anderson came into the room. “Ender,” he called, looking around.

One of the frozen Dragon soldiers tried to answer him through jaws that were clamped shut by the flash suit. Anderson hooked over to him and thawed him.

Ender was smiling. “I beat you again, sir,” he said.

“Nonsense, Ender,” Anderson said softly. "Your battle was with Griffin and Tiger.”

“How stupid do you think I am?” said Ender.

Loudly, Anderson said, "After that little maneuver, the rules are being revised to require that all of the enemy's soldiers must be frozen or disabled before the gate can be reversed.”

“It could only work once anyway,” Ender said.

Anderson handed him the hook. Ender unfroze everyone at once. To hell with protocol. To hell with everything. “Hey!” he shouted as Anderson moved away. "What is it next time? My army in a cage without guns, with the rest of the Battle School against them? How about a little equality?”

There was a loud murmur of agreement from the other boys, and not all of it came from Dragon Army. Anderson did not so much as turn around to acknowledge Ender's challenge. Finally, it was William Bee who answered. "Ender, if you're on one side of the battle, it won't be equal no matter what the conditions are.”

Right! called the boys. Many of them laughed. Talo Momoe began clapping his hands. “Ender Wiggin!” he shouted. The other boys also clapped and shouted Ender's name.

Ender passed through the enemy gate. His soldiers followed him. The sound of them shouting his name followed

him through the corridors.

“Practice tonight?” asked Crazy Tom.

Ender shook his head.

"Tomorrow morning then?”

"No.”

"Well, when?”

"Never again, as far as I'm concerned.”

He could hear the murmurs behind him.

“Hey, that's not fair,” said one of the boys. "It's not our fault the teachers are screwing up the game. You can't just stop teaching us stuff because--”

Ender slammed his open hand against the wall and shouted at the boy. “I don't care about the game anymore!” His voice echoed through the corridor. Boys from other armies came to their doors. He spoke quietly into the silence -- “Do you understand that?” And he whispered. "The game is over.”

He walked back to his room alone. He wanted to lie down, but he couldn't because the bed was wet. It reminded him of all that had happened today, and in fury he tore the mattress and blankets from the bedframe and shoved them out into the corridor. Then he wadded up a uniform to serve as a pillow and lay on the fabric of wires strung across the frame. It was uncomfortable, but Ender didn't care enough to get up.

He had only been there a few minutes when someone knocked on his door.

“Go away,” he said softly. Whoever was knocking didn't hear him or didn't care. Finally, Ender said to come in.

It was Bean.

"Go away, Bean.”

Bean nodded but didn't leave. Instead he looked at his shoes. Ender almost yelled at him, cursed at him, screamed at him to leave. Instead he noticed how very tired Bean looked, his whole body bent with weariness, his eyes dark from lack of sleep; and yet his skin was still soft and translucent, the skin of a child, the soft curved cheek, the slender limbs of a little boy. He wasn't eight years old yet. It didn't matter he was brilliant and dedicated and good. He was a child. He was young .

No he isn't, thought Ender. Small, yes. But Bean has been through a battle with a whole army depending on him and on the soldiers that he led, and he performed splendidly, and they won. There's no youth in that. No childhood.

Taking Ender's silence and softening expression as permission to stay, Bean took another step into the room. Only then did Ender see the small slip of paper in his hand.

“You're transferred?” asked Ender. He was incredulous, but his voice came out sounding uninterested, dead.

"To Rabbit Army.”

Ender nodded. Of course. It was obvious. If I can't be defeated with my army, they'll take my army away. “Carn Carby's a good man,” said Ender. "I hope he recognizes what you're worth.”

"Carn Carby was graduated today. He got his notice while we were fighting our battle.”

"Well, who's commanding Rabbit then?”

Bean held his hands out helplessly. "Me.”

Ender looked at the ceiling and nodded. "Of course. After all, you're only four years younger than the regular age.”

"It isn't funny. I don't know what's going on here. All the changes in the game. And now this. I wasn't the only one transferred, you know. They graduated half the commanders, and transferred a lot of our guys to command their armies.”

"Which guys?”

"It looks like -- every toon leader and every assistant.”

“Of course. If they decide to wreck my army, they'll cut it to the ground. Whatever they're doing, they're thorough.”

"You'll still win, Ender. We all know that. Crazy Tom, he said, 'You mean I'm supposed to figure out how to beat Dragon Army?' Everybody knows you're the best. They can't break you down, no matter what they--”

"They already have.”

"No, Ender, they can't--”

"I don't care about their game anymore, Bean. I'm not going to play it anymore. No more practices. No more battles. They can put their little slips of paper on the floor all they want, but I won't go. I decided that before I went through the door today. That's why I had you go for the gate. I didn't think it would work, but I didn't care. I just wanted to go out in style.”

"You should've seen William Bee's face. He just stood there trying to figure out how he had lost when you only had seven boys who could wiggle their toes and he only had three who couldn't.”

“Why should I want to see William Bee's face? Why should I want to beat anybody?” Ender pressed his palms

against his eyes. "I hurt Bonzo really bad today, Bean. I really hurt him bad."

"He had it coming."

"I knocked him out standing up. It was like he was dead, standing there. And I kept hurting him."

Bean said nothing.

"I just wanted to make sure he never hurt me again."

"He won't," said Bean. "They sent him home."

"Already?"

"The teachers didn't say much, they never do. The official notice says he was graduated, but where they put the assignment -- you know, tactical school, support, precommand, navigation, that kind of thing -- it just said Cartagena, Spain. That's his home."

"I'm glad they graduated him."

"Hell, Ender, we're just glad he's gone. If we'd known what he was doing to you, we would've killed him on the spot. Was it true he had a whole bunch of guys gang up on you?"

"No. It was just him and me. He fought with honor." If it weren't for his honor, he and the others would have beaten me together. They might have killed me, then. His sense of honor saved my life. "I didn't fight with honor," Ender added. "I fought to win."

Bean laughed. "And you did. Kicked him right out of orbit."

A knock on the door. Before Ender could answer, the door opened. Ender had been expecting more of his soldiers. Instead it was Major Anderson. And behind him came Colonel Graff.

"Ender Wiggin," said Graff.

Ender got to his feet. "Yes sir."

"Your display of temper in the battleroom today was insubordinate and is not to be repeated."

"Yes sir," said Ender.

Bean was still feeling insubordinate, and he didn't think Ender deserved the rebuke. "I think it was about time somebody told a teacher how we felt about what you've been doing."

The adults ignored him. Anderson handed Ender a sheet of paper. A full-sized sheet. Not one of the little slips of paper that served for internal orders within the Battle School; it was a full-fledged set of orders. Bean knew what it meant. Ender was being transferred out of the school.

“Graduated?” asked Bean. Ender nodded. "What took them so long? You're only two or three years early. You've already learned how to walk and talk and dress yourself. What will they have left to teach you?”

Ender shook his head, “All I know is, the game's over.” He folded up the paper. "None too soon. Can I tell my army?”

“There isn't time,” said Graff. "Your shuttle leaves in twenty minutes. Besides, it's better not to talk to them after you get your orders. It makes it easier.”

“For them or for you?” Ender asked. He didn't wait for an answer. He turned quickly to Bean, took his hand for a moment, and then headed for the door.

“Wait,” said Bean. "Where are you going? Tactical? Navigational? Support?”

“Command School,” Ender answered.

"Pre-command?”

“Command,” said Ender, and then he was out the door, Anderson followed him closely. Bean grabbed Colonel Graff by the sleeve. "Nobody goes to Command School until they're sixteen!”

Graff shook off Bean's hand and left, closing the door behind him.

Bean stood alone in the room, trying to grasp what this might mean. Nobody went to Command School without three years of Pre-command in either Tactical or Support. But then, nobody left Battle School without at least six years, and Ender had had only four.

The system is breaking up. No doubt about it. Either somebody at the top is going crazy, or something's gone wrong with the war, the real war, the bugger war. Why else would they break down the training system like this, wreck the game the way they did? Why else would they put a little kid like me in command of an army?

Bean wondered about it as he walked back down the corridor to his own bed. The lights went out just as he reached his bunk. He undressed in darkness, fumbling to put his clothing in a locker he couldn't see. He felt terrible. At first he thought he felt bad because he was afraid of leading an army, but it wasn't true. He knew he'd make a good commander. He felt himself wanting to cry. He hadn't cried since the first few days of homesickness after he got here. He tried to put a name on the feeling that put a lump in his throat and made him sob silently, however much he tried to hold it down. He bit down on his hand to stop the feeling, to

replace it with pain. It didn't help. He would never see Ender again.

Once he named the feeling, he could control it. He lay back and forced himself to go through the relaxing routine until he didn't feel like crying anymore. Then he drifted off to sleep. His hand was near his mouth. It lay on his pillow hesitantly, as if Bean couldn't decide whether to bite his nails or suck on his fingertips. His forehead was creased and furrowed. His breathing was quick and light. He was a soldier, and if anyone had asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up, he wouldn't have known what they meant.

When he was crossing into the shuttle, Ender noticed for the first time that the insignia on Major Anderson's uniform had changed. “Yes, he's a colonel now,” said Graff. "In fact, Major Anderson has been placed in command of the Battle School, as of this afternoon. I have been reassigned to other duties.”

Ender did not ask him what they were.

Graff strapped himself into a seat across the aisle from him. There was only one other passenger, a quiet man in civilian clothes who was introduced as General Pace. Pace was carrying a briefcase, but carried no more luggage than Ender did. Somehow that was comforting to Ender, that Graff also came away empty.

Ender spoke only once on the voyage home. “Why are we going home?” he asked. "I thought Command School was in the asteroids somewhere.”

“It is,” said Graff. "But the Battle School has no facilities for docking long-range ships. So you get a short landside leave.”

Ender wanted to ask if that meant he could see his family. But suddenly, at the thought that it might be possible, he was afraid, and so he didn't ask. Just closed his eyes and tried to sleep. Behind him, General Pace was studying him; for what purpose, Ender could not guess.

It was a hot summer afternoon in Florida when they landed. Ender had been so long without sunlight that the light nearly blinded him, He squinted and sneezed and wanted to get back indoors. Everything was far away and flat; the ground, lacking the upward curve of Battle School floors, seemed instead to fall away, so that on level ground

Ender felt as though he were on a pinnacle. The pull of real gravity felt different and he scuffed his feet when he walked. He hated it. He wanted to go back home, back to the Battle School, the only place in the universe where he belonged.

"Arrested?"

"Well, it's a natural thought. General Pace is the head of the military police. There was a death in the Battle School."

"They didn't tell me whether Colonel Graff was being promoted or court-martialed. Just transferred, with orders to report to the Polemarch."

"Is that a good sign or bad?"

"Who knows? On the one hand, Ender Wiggin not only survived, he passed a threshold, he graduated in dazzlingly good shape, you have to give old Graff credit for that. On the other hand, there's the fourth passenger on the shuttle. The one traveling in a bag."

"Only the second death in the history of the school. At least it wasn't a suicide this time."

"How is murder better, Major Imbu?"

"It wasn't murder, Colonel. We have it on video from two angles. No one can blame Ender."

"But they might blame Graff. After all this is over, the civilians can rake over our files and decide what was right and what was not. Give us medals where they think we were right, take away our pensions and put us in jail where they decide we were wrong. At least they had the good sense not to tell Ender that the boy died."

"Its the second time, too."

"They didn't tell him about Stilson, either."

"The kid is scary."

"Ender Wiggin isn't a killer. He just wins -- thoroughly. If anybody's going to be scared, let it be the buggers"

"Makes you almost feel sorry for them, knowing Ender's going to be coming after them."

"The only one I feel sorry for is Ender. But not sorry enough to suggest they ought to let up on him. I just got access to the material that Graff's been getting all this time. About fleet movements, that sort of thing. I used to sleep easy at night."

"Time's getting short?"

"I shouldn't have mentioned it. I can't tell you secured information."

"I know."

"Let's leave it at this: they didn't get him to Command School a day too soon. And maybe a couple of years too late."

Ender's Game

13

Valentine

"Children?"

"Brother and sister. They had layered themselves five times through the nets -- writing for companies that paid for their memberships, that sort of thing. Devil of a time tracking them down."

"What are they hiding?"

"Could be anything. The most obvious thing to hide, though, is their ages. The boy is fourteen, the girl is twelve."

"Which one is Demosthenes?"

"The girl. The twelve-year-old."

"Pardon me. I don't really think it's funny, but I can't help but laugh. All this time we've been worried, all the time we've been trying to persuade the Russians not to take Demosthenes too seriously, we held up Locke as proof that Americans weren't all crazy warmongers. Brother and sister, prepubescent--"

"And their last name is Wiggin."

"Ah. Coincidence?"

"The Wiggin is a third. They are one and two."

"Oh, excellent. The Russians will never believe--"

"That Demosthenes and Locke aren't as much under our control as the Wiggin."

"Is there a conspiracy? Is someone controlling them?"

"We have been able to detect no contact between these two children and any adult who might be directing them."

"That is not to say that someone might not have invented some method you can't detect. It's hard to believe that two children--"

"I interviewed Colonel Graff when he arrived from the Battle School. It is his best judgment that nothing these children have done is out of their reach. Their abilities are virtually identical with -- the Wiggin. Only their temperaments are different. What surprised him, however, was the orientation of the two personas. Demosthenes is

definitely the girl, but Graff says the girl was rejected for Battle School because she was too pacific, too conciliatory, and above all, too empathic."

"Definitely not Demosthenes."

"And the boy has the soul of a jackal."

"Wasn't it Locke that was recently praised as 'The only truly open mind in America'?"

"It's hard to know what's really happening. But Graff recommended, and I agree, that we should leave them alone. Not expose them. Make no report at this time except that we have determined that Locke and Demosthenes have no foreign connections and have no connections with any domestic group, either, except those publicly declared on the nets."

"In other words, give them a clean bill of health,"

"I know Demosthenes seems dangerous, in part because he or she has such a wide following. But I think it's significant that the one of the two of them who is most ambitious has chosen the moderate, wise persona. And they're still just talking. They have influence, but no power."

"In my experience, influence is power."

"If we ever find them getting out of line, we can easily expose them."

"Only in the next few years. The longer we wait, the older they get, and the less shocking it is to discover who they are."

"You know what the Russian troop movements have been. There's always the chance that Demosthenes is right. In which case--"

"We'd better have Demosthenes around. All right. We'll show them clean, for now. But watch them. And I, of course, have to find ways of keeping the Russians calm."

In spite of all her misgivings, Valentine was having fun being Demosthenes. Her column was now being carried on practically every newsnet in the country, and it was fun to watch the money pile up in her attorney's accounts. Every now and then she and Peter would, in Demosthenes' name, donate a carefully calculated sum to a particular candidate or cause: enough money that the donation would be noticed, but not so much that the candidate would feel she was trying to buy a vote. She was getting so many letters now that her newsnet had hired a secretary to answer certain classes of routine correspondence for her. The fun letters, from national

and international leaders, sometimes hostile, sometimes friendly, always diplomatically trying to pry into Demosthenes' mind -- those she and Peter read together, laughing in delight sometimes that people like this were writing to children, and didn't know it.

Sometimes, though, she was ashamed. Father was reading Demosthenes regularly; he never read Locke, or if he did, he said nothing about it. At dinner, though, he would often regale them with some telling point Demosthenes had made in that day's column. Peter loved it when Father did that -- “See, it shows that the common man is paying attention” -- but it made Valentine feel humiliated for Father. If he ever found out that all this time I was writing the columns he told us about, and that I didn't even believe half the things I wrote, he would be angry and ashamed.

At school, she once nearly got them in trouble, when her history teacher assigned the class to write a paper contrasting the views of Demosthenes and Locke as expressed in two of their early columns. Valentine was careless, and did a brilliant job of analysis. As a result, she had to work hard to talk the principal out of having her essay published on the very newsnet that carried Demosthenes' column. Peter was savage about it. "You write too much like Demosthenes, you can't get published, I should kill Demosthenes now, you're getting out of control.”

If he raged about that blunder, Peter frightened her still more when he went silent. It happened when Demosthenes was invited to take part in the President's Council on Education for the Future, a blue-ribbon panel that was designed to do nothing, but do it splendidly. Valentine thought Peter would take it as a triumph, but he did not. “Turn it down,” he said.

“Why should I?” she asked, "It's no work at all, and they even said that because of Demosthenes' well-known desire for privacy, they would net all the meetings. It makes Demosthenes into a respectable person, and--”

"And you love it that you got that before I did.”

"Peter, it isn't you and me, it's Demosthenes and Locke. We made them up. They aren't real. Besides, this appointment doesn't mean they like Demosthenes better than Locke, it just means that Demosthenes has a much stronger base of support. You knew he would. Appointing him pleases a large number of Russian-haters and chauvinists.”

"It wasn't supposed to work this way. Locke was

supposed to be the respected one."

"He is! Real respect takes longer than official respect. Peter, don't be angry at me because I've done well with the things you told me to do."

But he was angry, for days, and ever since then he had left her to think through all her own columns, instead of telling her what to write. He probably assumed that this would make the quality of Demosthenes' columns deteriorate, but if it did no one noticed. Perhaps it made him even angrier that she never came to him weeping for help. She had been Demosthenes too long now to need anyone to tell her what Demosthenes would think about things.

And as her correspondence with other politically active citizens grew, she began to learn things, information that simply wasn't available to the general public. Certain military people who corresponded with her dropped hints about things without meaning to, and she and Peter put them together to build up a fascinating and frightening picture of Warsaw Pact activity. They were indeed preparing for war, a vicious and bloods earthbound war. Demosthenes wasn't wrong to suspect that the Warsaw Pact was not abiding by the terms of the League.

And the character of Demosthenes gradually took on a life of his own. At times she found herself thinking like Demosthenes at the end of a writing session, agreeing with ideas that were supposed to be calculated poses. And sometimes she read Peter's Locke essays and found herself annoyed at his obvious blindness to what was really going on.

Perhaps it's impossible to wear an identity without becoming what you pretend to be. She thought of that, worried about it for a few days, and then wrote a column using that as a premise, to show that politicians who toadied to the Russians in order to keep the peace would inevitably end up subservient to them in everything. It was a lovely bite at the party in power, and she got a lot of good mail about it. She also stopped being frightened of the idea of becoming, to a degree, Demosthenes. He's smarter than Peter and I ever gave him credit for, she thought.

Graff was waiting for her after school. He stood leaning on his car. He was in civilian clothes, and he had gained weight, so she didn't recognize him at first. But he beckoned to her, and before he could introduce himself she remembered his name.

“I won't write another letter,” she said. "I never should have written that one.

"You don't like medals, then, I guess.”

"Not much.”

"Come for a ride with me, Valentine.”

"I don't ride with strangers.”

He handed her a paper. It was a release form, and her parents had signed it.

"I guess you're not a stranger. Where are we going?”

"To see a young soldier who is in Greensboro on leave.”

She got in the car. “Ender's only ten years old,” she said. "I thought you told us the first time he'd be eligible for a leave was when he was twelve.”

"He skipped a few grades.”

"So he's doing well?”

"Ask him when you see him.”

"Why me? Why not the whole family?”

Graff sighed. "Ender sees the world his own way. We had to persuade him to see you. As for Peter and your parents, he was not interested. Life at the Battle School was -- intense.”

"What do you mean, he's gone crazy?”

"On the contrary, he's the sanest person I know. He's sane enough to know that his parents are not particularly eager to reopen a book of affection that was closed quite tightly four years ago. As for Peter -- we didn't even suggest a meeting, and so he didn't have a chance to tell us to go to hell.”

They went out Lake Brandt Road and turned off just past the lake, following a road that wound down and up until they came to a white clapboard mansion that sprawled along the top of a hill. It looked over Lake Brandt on one side and a five-acre private lake on the other. “This is the house that Medly's Mist-E-Rub built,” said Graff. "The I.F. picked it up in a tax sale about twenty years ago. Ender insisted that his conversation with you should not be bugged. I promised him it wouldn't be, and to help inspire confidence, the two of you are going out on a raft he built himself. I should warn you, though. I intend to ask you questions about your conversation when it is finished. You don't have to answer, but I hope you will.”

"I didn't bring a swimming suit.”

"We can provide one.”

"One that isn't bugged?”

"At some point, there must be trust. For instance, I know

who Demosthenes really is."

She felt a thrill of fear run through her, but said nothing.

"I've known since I landed from the Battle School, There are, perhaps, six of us in the world who know his identity. Not counting the Russians -- God only knows what they know. But Demosthenes has nothing to fear from us. Demosthenes can trust our discretion. Just as I trust Demosthenes not to tell Locke what's going on here today. Mutual trust. We tell each other things."

Valentine couldn't decide whether it was Demosthenes they approved of, or Valentine Wiggin. If the former, she would not trust them; if the latter, the perhaps she could. The fact that they did not want her to discuss this with Peter suggested that perhaps they knew the difference between them. She did not stop to wonder whether she herself knew the difference any more.

"You said he built the raft. How long has be been here?"

"Two months. We meant his leave to last only a few days. But you see, he doesn't seem interested in going on with his education."

"Oh. So I'm therapy again."

"This time we can't censor your letter, We're just taking our chances. We need your brother badly. Humanity is on the cusp."

This time Val had grown up enough to know just how much danger the world was in. And she had been Demosthenes long enough that she didn't hesitate to do her duty. "Where is he?"

"Down at the boat slip."

"Where's the swimming suit?"

Ender didn't wave when she walked down the hill toward him, didn't smile when she stepped onto the floating boat slip. But she knew that he was glad to see her, knew it because of the way his eyes never left her face.

"You're bigger than I remembered," she said stupidly.

"You too," he said. "I also remembered that you were beautiful."

"Memory does play tricks on us."

"No. Your face is the same, but I don't remember what beautiful means anymore. Come on. Let's go out into the lake."

She looked at the small raft with misgivings.

"Don't stand up on it, that's all," he said. He got on by crawling, spiderlike, on toes and fingers. "It's the first thing I

built with my own hands since you and I used to build with blocks. Peter-proof buildings."

She laughed. They used to take pleasure in building things that would stand up even when a lot of the obvious supports had been removed. Peter, in turn, liked to remove a block here or there, so the structure would be fragile enough that the next person to touch it would knock it down. Peter was an ass, but he did provide some focus to their childhood.

"Peter's changed," she said.

"Let's not talk about him," said Ender.

"All right."

She crawled onto the boat, not as deftly as Ender. He used a paddle to maneuver them slowly toward the center of the private lake. She noticed aloud that he was sunbrowned and strong.

"The strong part comes from Battle School. The sunbrowning comes from this lake. I spend a lot of time on the water. When I'm swimming, it's like being weightless. I miss being weightless. Also, when I'm here on the lake, the land slopes up in every direction."

"Like living in a bowl."

"I've lived in a bowl for four years."

"So we're strangers now?"

"Aren't we, Valentine?"

"No," she said. She reached out and touched his leg. Then, suddenly, she squeezed his knee, right where he had always been most ticklish.

But almost at the same moment, he caught her wrist in his hand. His grip was very strong, even though his hands were smaller than hers and his own arms were slender and tight. For a moment he looked dangerous; then he relaxed. "Oh, yes," he said. "You used to tickle me."

In answer, she dropped herself over the side of the raft. The water was clear and clean, and there was no chlorine in it. She swam for a while, then returned to the raft and lay on it in the hazy sunlight. A wasp circled her, then landed on the raft beside her head. She knew it was there, and ordinarily would have been afraid of it. But not today. Let it walk on this raft, let it bake in the sun as I'm doing.

Then the raft rocked, and she turned to see Ender calmly crushing the life out of the wasp with one finger. "These are a nasty breed," Ender said. "They sting you without waiting to be insulted first," He smiled. "I've been learning about pre-emptive strategies. I'm very good. No one ever beat me. I'm

the best soldier they ever had."

"Who would expect less?" she said. "You're a Wiggin."

"Whatever that means," he said.

"It means that you are going to make a difference in the world." And she told him what she and Peter were doing.

"How old is Peter, fourteen? Already planning to take over the world?"

"He thinks he's Alexander the Great. And why shouldn't he be? Why shouldn't you be, too?"

"We can't both be Alexander."

"Two faces of the same coin. And I am the metal in between." Even as she said it, she wondered if it was true. She had shared so much with Peter these last few years that even when she thought she despised him, she understood him. While Ender had been only a memory till now. A very small, fragile boy who needed her protection. Not this cold-eyed, dark-skinned manling who kills wasps with his fingers. Maybe he and Peter and I are all the same, and have been all along. Maybe we only thought we were different from each other out of jealousy.

"The trouble with coins is, when one face is up, the other face is down."

And right now you think you're down. "They want me to encourage you to go on with your studies."

"They aren't studies, they're games. All games, from beginning to end, only they change the rules whenever they feel like it." He held up a limp hand. "See the strings?"

"But you can use them, too."

"Only if they want to be used. Only if they think they're using you. No, it's too hard, I don't want to play anymore. Just when I start to be happy, just when I think I can handle things, they stick in another knife. I keep having nightmares, now that I'm here. I dream I'm in the battleroom, only instead of being weightless, they're playing games with gravity. They keep changing its direction. So I never end up on the wall I launched for. I never end up where I meant to go. And I keep pleading with them just to let me get to the door, and they won't let me out, they keep sucking me back in."

She heard the anger in his voice and assumed it was directed at her. "I suppose that's what I'm here for. To suck you back in."

"I didn't want to see you."

"They told me."

"I was afraid that I'd still love you."

"I hoped that you would."

"My fear, your wish -- both granted."

"Ender, it really is true. We may be young, but we're not powerless. We play by their rules long enough, and it becomes our game." She giggled. "I'm on a presidential commission. Peter is so angry."

"They don't let me use the nets. There isn't a computer in the place, except the household machines that run the security system and the lighting. Ancient things. Installed back a century ago, when they made computers that didn't hook up with anything. They took away my army, they took away my desk, and you know something? I don't really mind."

"You must be good company for yourself."

"Not me. My memories."

"Maybe that's who you are, what you remember."

"No. My memories of strangers. My memories of the buggers."

Valentine shivered, as if a cold breeze had suddenly passed. "I refuse to watch the bugger vids anymore. They're always the same.

"I used to study them for hours. The way their ships move through space. And something funny, that only occurred to me lying out here on the lake. I realized that all the battles in which buggers and humans fought hand to hand, all those are from the First Invasion. All the scenes from the Second Invasion, when our soldiers are in I.F. uniforms, in those scenes the buggers are always already dead. Lying there, slumped over their controls. Not a sign of struggle or anything. And Mazer Rackham's battle -- they never show us any footage from that battle."

"Maybe it's a secret weapon."

"No, no, I don't care about how we killed them. It's the buggers themselves. I don't know anything about them, and yet someday I'm supposed to fight them. I've been through a lot of fights in my life, sometimes games, sometimes -- not games. Every time, I've won because I could understand the way my enemy thought. From what they did . I could tell what they thought I was doing, how they wanted the battle to take shape. And I played off of that. I'm very good at that. Understanding how other people think."

"The curse of the Wiggin children." She joked, but it frightened her, that Ender might understand her as

completely as he did his enemies. Peter always understood her, or at least thought he did, but he was such a moral sinkhole that she never had to feel embarrassed when he guessed even her worst thoughts. But Ender -- she did not want him to understand her. It would make her naked before him. She would be ashamed. "You don't think you can beat the buggers unless you know them."

"It goes deeper than that. Being here alone with nothing to do, I've been thinking about myself, too. Trying to understand why I hate myself so badly."

"No, Ender."

"Don't tell me 'No, Ender.' It took me a long time to realize that I did, but believe me, I did. Do. And it came down to this: In the moment when I truly understand my enemy, understand him well enough to defeat him, then in that very moment I also love him. I think it's impossible to really understand somebody, what they want, what they believe, and not love them the way they love themselves. And then, in that very moment when I love them--"

"You beat them." For a moment she was not afraid of his understanding.

"No, you don't understand. I destroy them. I make it impossible for them to ever hurt me again. I grind them and grind them until they don't exist."

"Of course you don't." And now the fear came again, worse than before. Peter has mellowed, but you, they've made you into a killer. Two sides of the same coin, but which side is which?

"I've really hurt some people, Val. I'm not making this up."

"I know, Ender." How will you hurt me?

"See what I'm becoming, Val?" he said softly. "Even you are afraid of me." And he touched her cheek so gently that she wanted to cry. Like the touch of his soft baby hand when he was still an infant. She remembered that, the touch of his soft and innocent hand on her cheek.

"I'm not," she said, and in that moment it was true.

"You should be."

No. I shouldn't. "You're going to shrivel up if you stay in the water. Also, the sharks might get you."

He smiled. "The sharks learned to leave me alone a long time ago." But he pulled himself onto the raft, bringing a wash of water across it as it tipped. It was cold on Valentine's back.

"Ender, Peter's going to do it. He's smart enough to take the time it takes, but he's going to win his way into power -- if not right now, then later. I'm not sure yet whether that'll be a good thing or a bad thing. Peter can be cruel, but he knows the getting and keeping of power, and there are signs that once the bugger war is over, and maybe even before it ends, the world will collapse into chaos again. The Warsaw Pact was on its way to hegemony before the First Invasion. If they try for it afterward--"

"So even Peter might be a better alternative."

"You've been discovering some of the destroyer in yourself, Ender. Well, so have I. Peter didn't have a monopoly on that, whatever the testers thought. And Peter has some of the builder in him. He isn't kind, but he doesn't break every good thing he sees anymore. Once you realize that power will always end up with the sort of people who crave it, I think that there are worse people who could have it than Peter."

"With that strong a recommendation, I could vote for him myself."

"Sometimes it seems absolutely silly. A fourteen-year-old boy and his kid sister plotting to take over the world." She tried to laugh. It wasn't funny. "We aren't just ordinary children, are we. None of us."

"Don't you sometimes wish we were?"

She tried to imagine herself being like the other girls at school. Tried to imagine life if she didn't feel responsible for the future of the world. "It would be so dull."

"I don't think so." And he stretched out on the raft, as if he could lie on the water forever.

It was true. Whatever they did to Ender in the Battle School, they had spent his ambition. He really did not want to leave the sun-warmed waters of this bowl.

No, she realized. No, he believes that he doesn't want to leave here, but there is still too much of Peter in him. Or too much of me. None of us could be happy for long, doing nothing. Or perhaps it's just that none of us could be happy living with no other company than ourself.

So she began to prod again. "What is the one name that everyone in the world knows?"

"Mazer Rackham."

"And what if you win the next war, the way Mazer did?"

"Mazer Rackham was a fluke. A reserve. Nobody believed in him. He just happened to be in the right place at

the right time."

"But suppose you do it. Suppose you beat the buggers and your name is known the way Mazer Rackham's name is known."

"Let somebody else be famous. Peter wants to be famous. Let him save the world."

"I'm not talking about fame, Ender. I'm not talking about power, either. I'm talking about accidents, just like the accident that Mazer Rackham happened to be the one who was there when somebody had to stop the buggers."

"If I'm here," said Ender, "then I won't be there. Somebody else will. Let them have the accident."

His tone of weary unconcern infuriated her. "I'm talking about my life, you self-centered little bastard." If her words bothered him, he didn't show it. Just lay there, eyes closed. "When you were little and Peter tortured you, it's a good thing I didn't lie back and wait for Mom and Dad to save you. They never understood how dangerous Peter was. I knew you had the monitor, but I didn't wait for them, either. Do you know what Peter used to do to me because I stopped him from hurting you?"

"Shut up," Ender whispered.

Because she saw that his chest was trembling, because she knew that she had indeed hurt him, because she knew that just like Peter, she had found his weakest place and stabbed him there, she fell silent.

"I can't beat them," Ender said softly, "I'll be out there like Mazer Rackham one day, and everybody will be depending on me, and I won't be able to do it."

"If you can't, Ender, then nobody could. If you can't beat them, then they deserve to win because they're stronger and better than us. It won't be your fault."

"Tell it to the dead."

"If not you, then who?"

"Anybody."

"Nobody, Ender. I'll tell you something. If you try and lose then it isn't your fault. But if you don't try and we lose, then it's all your fault. You killed us all."

"I'm a killer no matter what."

"What else should you be? Human beings didn't evolve brains in order to lie around on lakes. Killing's the first thing we learned. And a good thing we did, or we'd be dead, and the tigers would own the earth."

"I could never beat Peter. No matter what I said or did. I

never could.”

So it came back to Peter. "He was years older than you. And stronger.”

"So are the buggers.”

She could see his reasoning. Or rather, his unreasoning. He could win all he wanted, but he knew in his heart that there was always someone who could destroy him, He always knew that he had not really won, because there was Peter, undefeated champion.

“You want to beat Peter?” she asked.

“No,” he answered.

"Beat the buggers. Then come home and see who notices Peter Wiggin anymore. Look him in the eye when all the world loves and reveres you. That'll be defeat in his eyes, Ender. That's how you win.”

“You don't understand,” he said.

"Yes I do.”

"No you don't. I don't want to beat Peter.”

"Then what do you want?”

"I want him to love me.”

She had no answer. As far as she knew, Peter didn't love anybody.

Ender said nothing more. Just lay there. And lay there.

Finally Valentine, the sweat dripping off her, the mosquitos beginning to hover as the dusk came on, took one final dip in the water and then began to push the raft in to shore. Ender showed no sign that he knew what she was doing, but his irregular breathing told her that he was not asleep. When they got to shore, she climbed onto the dock and said, "I love you, Ender. More than ever. No matter what you decide.”

He didn't answer. She doubted that he believed her. She walked back up the hill, savagely angry at them for making her come to Ender like this. For she had, after all, done just what they wanted. She had talked Ender into going back into his training, and he wouldn't soon forgive her for that.

Ender came in the door, still wet from his last dip in the lake. It was dark outside, and dark in the room where Graff waited for him.

“Are we going now?” asked Ender.

“If you want to,” Graff said.

"When?"

"When you're ready."

Ender showered and dressed. He was finally used to the way civilian clothes fit together, but he still didn't feel right without a uniform or a flash suit. I'll never wear a flash suit again, he thought. That was the Battle School game, and I'm through with that. He heard the crickets chirping madly in the woods; in the near distance he heard the crackling sound of a car driving slowly on gravel.

What else should he take with him? He had read several of the books in the library, but they belonged to the house and he couldn't take them. The only thing he owned was the raft he had made with his own hands. That would stay here, too.

The lights were on now in the room where Graff waited. He, too, had changed clothing. He was back to uniform.

They sat in the back seat of the car together, driving along country roads to come at the airport from the back. "Back when the population was growing," said Graff, "they kept this area in woods and farms. Watershed land. The rainfall here starts a lot of rivers flowing, a lot of underground water moving around. The Earth is deep, and right to the heart it's alive, Ender. We people only live on the top, like the bugs that live on the scum of the still water near the shore."

Ender said nothing.

"We train our commanders the way we do because that's what it takes -- they have to think in certain ways. They can't be distracted by a lot of things, so we isolate them. You. Keep you separate. And it works. But it's so easy, when you never meet people, when you never know the Earth itself, when you live with metal walls keeping out the cold of space, it's easy to forget why Earth is worth saving. Why the world of people might be worth the price you pay."

So that's why you brought me here, thought Ender. With all your hurry, that's why you took three months, to make me love Earth. Well, it worked. All your tricks worked. Valentine, too; she was another one of your tricks, to make me remember that I'm not going to school for myself. Well, I remember.

"I may have used Valentine," said Graff, "and you may hate me for it, Ender, but keep this in mind -- it only works because what's between you, that's real, that's what matters. Billions of those connections between human beings. That's

what you're fighting to keep alive."

Ender turned his face to the window and watched the helicopters and dirigibles rise and fall.

They took a helicopter to the I.F. spaceport at Stumpy Point. It was officially named for a dead Hegemon, but everybody called it Stumpy Point, after the pitiful little town that had been paved over when they made the approaches to the vast islands of steel and concrete that dotted Pamlico Sound. There were still waterbirds taking their fastidious little steps in the saltwater, where mossy trees dipped down as if to drink. It began to rain lightly, and the concrete was black and slick; it was hard to tell where it left off and the Sound began.

Graff led him through a maze of clearances. Authority was a little plastic ball that Graff carried. He dropped it into chutes, and doors opened and people stood up and saluted and the chutes spat out the ball and Graff went on. Ender noticed that at first everyone watched Graff, but as they penetrated deeper into the spaceport, people began watching Ender. At first it was the man of real authority they noticed, but later, where everyone had authority, it was his cargo they cared to see.

Only when Graff strapped himself into the shuttle seat beside him hid Ender realize Graff was going to launch with him.

"How far?" asked Ender. "How far are you going with me?"

Graff smiled thinly. "All the way, Ender."

"Are they making you administrator of Command School?"

"No."

So they had removed Graff from his post at Battle School solely to accompany Ender to his next assignment. How important am I, he wondered. And like a whisper of Peter's voice inside his mind, he heard the question, How can I use this?

He shuddered and tried to think of something else. Peter could have fantasies about ruling the world, but Ender didn't have them. Still, thinking back on his life in Battle School, it occurred to him that although he bad never sought power, he had always had it. But he decided that it was a power born of excellence, not manipulation. He had no reason to be ashamed of it. He had never, except perhaps with Bean, used his power to hurt someone. And with Bean, things had

worked well after all. Bean had become a friend, finally, to take the place of the lost Alai, who in turn took the place of Valentine. Valentine, who was helping Peter in his plotting. Valentine, who still loved Ender no matter what happened. And following that train of thought led him back to Earth, back to the quiet hours in the center of the clear water ringed by a bowl of tree-covered hills. That is Earth, he thought. Not a globe thousands of kilometers around, but a forest with a shining lake, a house hidden at the crest of the hill, high in the trees, a grassy slope leading upward from the water, fish leaping and birds strafing to take the bugs that lived at the border between water and sky. Earth was the constant noise of crickets and winds and birds. And the voice of one girl, who spoke to him out of his far-off childhood. The same voice that had once protected him from terror. The same voice that he would do anything to keep alive, even return to school, even leave Earth behind again for another four or forty or four thousand years. Even if she loved Peter more.

His eyes were closed, and he had not made any sound but breathing; still, Graff reached out and touched his hand across the aisle. Ender stiffened in surprise, and Graff soon withdrew, but for a moment Ender was struck with the startling thought that perhaps Graff felt some affection for him. But no, it was just another calculated gesture. Graff was creating a commander out of a little boy. No doubt Unit 17 in the course of studies included an affectionate gesture from the teacher.

The shuttle reached the IPL satellite in only a few hours. Inter-Planetary Launch was a city of three thousand inhabitants, breathing oxygen from the plants that also fed them, drinking water that had already passed through their bodies ten thousand times, living only to service the tugs that did all the oxwork in the solar system and the shuttles that took their cargos and passengers back to the Earth or the Moon. It was a world where, briefly, Ender felt at home, since its floors sloped upward as they did in the Battle School.

Their tug was fairly new; the I.F. was constantly casting off its old vehicles and purchasing the latest models. It had just brought a vast load of drawn steel processed by a factory ship that was taking apart minor planets in the asteroid belt. The steel would be dropped to the Moon, and now the tug was linked to fourteen barges. Graff dropped his ball into the reader again, however, and the barges were uncoupled from

the tug. It would be making a fast run this time, to a destination of Graff's specification, not to be stated until the tug had cut loose from IPL.

“It's no great secret,” said the tug's captain. “Whenever the destination is unknown, it's for ISL.” By analogy with IPL, Ender decided the letters meant Inter-Stellar Launch.

“This time it isn't,” said Graff.

"Where then?”

"I.F. Command.”

"I don't have security clearance even to know where that is, sir.”

“Your ship knows,” said Graff. “Just let the computer have a look at this, and follow the course it plots.” He handed the captain the plastic ball.

"And I'm supposed to close my eyes during the whole voyage, so I don't figure out where we are?”

"Oh, no, of course not. I.F. Command is on the minor planet Eros, which should be about three months away from here at the highest possible speed. Which is the speed you'll use, of course.”

"Eros? But I thought that the buggers burned that to a radioactive -- ah. When did I receive security clearance to know this?”

"You didn't. So when we arrive at Eros, you will undoubtedly be assigned to permanent duty there.”

The captain understood immediately, and didn't like it. "I'm a pilot, you son of a bitch, and you got no right to lock me up on a rock!”

"I will overlook your derisive language to a superior officer. I do apologize, but my orders were to take the fastest available military tug. At the moment I arrived, that was you. It isn't as though anyone were out to get you. Cheer up. The war may be over in another fifteen years, and then the location of I.F. Command won't have to be a secret anymore. By the way, you should be aware, in case you're one of those who relies on visuals for docking, that Eros has been blacked out. Its albedo is only slightly brighter than a black hole. You won't see it.”

“Thanks,” said the captain.

It was nearly a month into the voyage before he managed to speak civilly to Colonel Graff.

The shipboard computer had a limited library -- it was geared primarily to entertainment rather than education. So during the voyage, after breakfast and morning exercises,

Ender and Graff would usually talk. About Command School, About Earth. About astronomy and physics and whatever Ender wanted to know.

And above all, he wanted to know about the buggers.

“We don't know much,” said Graff. "We've never had a live one in custody. Even when we caught one unarmed and alive, he died the moment it became obvious he was captured. Even the he is uncertain -- the most likely thing, in fact, is that most bugger soldiers are females, but with atrophied or vestigial sexual organs. We can't tell. It's their psychology that would be most useful to you, and we haven't exactly had a chance to interview them.”

"Tell me what you know, and maybe I'll learn something that I need.”

So Graff told him. The buggers were organisms that could conceivably have evolved on Earth, if things had gone a different way a billion years ago. At the molecular level, there were no surprises. Even the genetic material was the same. It was no accident that they looked insectlike to human beings. Though their internal organs were now much more complex and specialized than any insects, and they had evolved an internal skeleton and shed most of the exoskeleton, their physical structure still echoed their ancestors, who could easily have been very much like Earth's ants. “But don't be fooled by that,” said Graff. "It's just as meaningful to say that our ancestors could easily have been very much like squirrels.”

“If that's all we have to go on, that's something,” said Ender.

“Squirrels never built starships,” said Graff. "There are usually a few changes on the way from gathering nuts and seeds to harvesting asteroids and putting permanent research stations on the moons of Saturn.”

The buggers could probably see about the same spectrum of light as human beings, and there was artificial lighting in their ships and ground installations. However, their antennae seemed almost vestigial. There was no evidence from their bodies that smelling, tasting, or hearing were particularly important to them. "Of course, we can't be sure. But we can't see any way that they could have used sound for communication. The oddest thing of all was that they also don't have any communication devices on their ships. No radios, nothing that could transmit or receive any kind of signal.”

"They communicate ship to ship. I've seen the videos, they talk to each other."

"True. But body to body, mind to mind. It's the most important thing we learned from them. Their communication, however they do it, is instantaneous. Lightspeed is no barrier. When Mazer Rackham defeated their invasion fleet, they all closed up shop. At once. There was no time for a signal. Everything just stopped."

Ender remembered the videos of uninjured buggers lying dead at their posts.

"We knew then that it was possible to communicate faster than light. That was seventy years ago, and once we knew it could be done, we did it. Not me, mind you, I wasn't born then."

"How is it possible?"

"I can't explain philotic physics to you. Half of it nobody understands anyway. What matters is we built the ansible. The official name is Philotic Parallax Instantaneous Communicator, but somebody dredged the name ansible out of an old book somewhere and it caught on. Not that most people even know the machine exists."

"That means that ships could talk to each other even when they're across the solar system," said Ender.

"It means," said Graff, "that ships could talk to each other even when they're across the galaxy. And the buggers can do it without machines."

"So they knew about their defeat the moment it happened," said Ender. "I always figured -- everybody always said that they probably only found out they lost the battle twenty five years ago."

"It keeps people from panicking," said Graff. "I'm telling you things that you can't know, by the way, if you're ever going to leave I.F. Command. Before the war's over."

Ender was angry. "If you know me at all, you know I can keep a secret."

"It's a regulation. People under twenty-five are assumed to be a security risk. It's very unjust to a good many responsible children, but it helps narrow the number of people who might let something slip."

"What's all the secrecy for, anyway?"

"Because we've taken some terrible risks, Ender, and we don't want to have every net on earth second-guessing those decisions. You see, as soon as we had a working ansible, we tucked it into our best starships and launched them to attack

the buggers home systems."

"Do we know where they are?"

"Yes."

"So we're not waiting for the Third Invasion."

"We are the Third Invasion."

"We're attacking them. Nobody says that. Everybody thinks we have a huge fleet of warships waiting in the comet shield--"

"Not one. We're quite defenseless here."

"What if they've sent a fleet to attack us?"

"Then we're dead. But our ships haven't seen such a fleet, not a sign of one."

"Maybe they gave up and they're planning to leave us alone."

"Maybe. You've seen the videos. Would you bet the human race on the chance of them giving up and leaving us alone?"

Ender tried to grasp the amounts of time that had gone by. "And the ships have been traveling for seventy years--"

"Some of them. And some for thirty years, and some for twenty. We make better ships now. We're learning how to play with space a little better. But every starship that is not still under construction is on its way to a bugger world or outpost. Every starship, with cruisers and fighters tucked into its belly, is out there approaching the buggers. Decelerating. Because they're almost there. The first ships we sent to the most distant objectives, the more recent ships to the closer ones. Our timing was pretty good. They'll all be arriving in combat range within a few months of each other. Unfortunately, our most primitive, outdated equipment will be attacking their homeworld. Still, they're armed well enough -- we have some weapons the buggers never saw before."

"When will they arrive?"

"Within the next five years. Ender. Everything is ready at I.F. Command. The master ansible is there, in contact with all our invasion fleet; the ships are all working, ready to fight. All we lack, Ender, is the battle commander. Someone who knows what the hell to do with those ships when they get there."

"And what if no one knows what to do with them?"

"We'll just do our best, with the best commander we can get."

Me, thought Ender, they want me to be ready in five

years. "Colonel Graff, there isn't a chance I'll be ready to command a fleet in time."

Graff shrugged. "So. Do your best. If you aren't ready, we'll make do with what we've got."

That eased Ender's mind.

But only for a moment, "Of course, Ender, what we've got right now is nobody."

Ender knew that this was another of Graff's games. Make me believe that it all depends on me, so I can't slack off, so I push myself as hard as possible.

Game or not, though, it might also be true. And so he would work as hard as possible. It was what Val had wanted of him. Five years. Only five years until the fleet arrives, and I don't know anything yet, "I'll only be fifteen in five years," Ender said.

"Going on sixteen," said Graff. "It all depends on what you know."

"Colonel Graff," he said. "I just want to go back and swim in the lake."

"After we win the war," said Graff, "Or lose it. We'll have a few decades before they get back here to finish us off. The house will be there, and I promise you can swim to your heart's content."

"But I'll still be too young for security clearance."

"We'll keep you under armed guard at all times. The military knows how to handle these things."

They both laughed, and Ender had to remind himself that Graff was only acting like a friend, that everything he did was a lie or a cheat calculated to turn Ender into an efficient fighting machine. I'll become exactly the tool you want me to be, said Ender silently, but at least I won't be fooled into it. I'll do it because I choose to, not because you tricked me, you sly bastard.

The tug reached Eros before they could see it. The captain showed them the visual scan, then superimposed the heat scan on the same screen. They were practically on top of it -- only four thousand kilometers out -- but Eros, only twenty-four kilometers long, was invisible if it didn't shine with reflected sunlight.

The captain docked the ship on one of the three landing platforms that circled Eros. It could not land directly because Eros had enhanced gravity, and the tug, designed for towing cargos, could never escape the gravity well. He bade them an irritable goodbye, but Ender and Graff remained cheerful.

The captain was bitter at having to leave his tug; Ender and Graff felt like prisoners finally paroled from jail. When they boarded the shuttle that would take them to the surface of Eros they repeated perverse misquotations of lines from the videos that the captain had endlessly watched, and laughed like madmen. The captain grew surly and withdrew by pretending to go to sleep. Then, almost as an afterthought, Ender asked Graff one last question.

"Why are we fighting the buggers?"

"I've heard all kinds of reasons," said Graff. "Because they have an overcrowded system and they've got to colonize. Because they can't stand the thought of other intelligent life in the universe. Because they don't think we are intelligent life. Because they have some weird religion. Because they watched our old video broadcasts and decided we were hopelessly violent. All kinds of reasons."

"What do you believe?"

"It doesn't matter what I believe."

"I want to know anyway."

"They must talk to each other directly, Ender, mind to mind. What one thinks, another can also think; what one remembers, another can also remember. Why would they ever develop language? Why would they ever learn to read and write? How would they know what reading and writing were if they saw them? Or signals? Or numbers? Or anything that we use to communicate? This isn't just a matter of translating from one language to another. They don't have a language at all. We used every means we could think of to communicate with them, but they don't even have the machinery to know we're signaling. And maybe they've been trying to think to us, and they can't understand why we don't respond."

"So the whole war is because we can't talk to each other."

"If the other fellow can't tell you his story, you can never be sure he isn't trying to kill you."

"What if we just left them alone?"

"Ender, we didn't go to them first, they came to us. If they were going to leave us alone, they could have done it a hundred years ago, before the First Invasion."

"Maybe they didn't know we were intelligent life. Maybe--"

"Ender, believe me, there's a century of discussion on this very subject. Nobody knows the answer. When it comes

down to it, though, the real decision is inevitable: if one of us has to be destroyed, let's make damn sure we're the ones alive at the end. Our genes won't let us decide any other way. Nature can't evolve a species that hasn't a will to survive. Individuals might be bred to sacrifice themselves, but the race as a whole can never decide to cease to exist. So if we can, we'll kill every last one of the buggers, and if they can they'll kill every last one of us."

"As for me," said Ender, "I'm in favor of surviving."

"I know," said Graff. "That's why you're here."

Ender's Game

14

Ender's Teacher

"Took your time, didn't you, Graff? The voyage isn't short, but the three month vacation seems excessive."

"I prefer not to deliver damaged merchandise."

"Some men simply have no sense of hurry. Oh well, it's only the fate of the world. Never mind me, You must understand our anxiety. We're here with the ansible, receiving constant reports of the progress of our starships. We have to face the coming war every day. If you can call them days. He's such a very little boy."

"There's greatness in him. A magnitude of spirit."

"A killer instinct, too, I hope."

"Yes."

"We've planned out an impromptu course of study for him. All subject to your approval, of course."

"I'll look at it. I don't pretend to know the subject matter, Admiral Chamrajnagar. I'm only here because I know Ender. So don't be afraid that I'll try to second guess the order of your presentation. Only the pace."

"How much can we tell him?"

"Don't waste his time on the physics of interstellar travel."

"What about the ansible?"

"I already told him about that, and the fleets. I said they would arrive at their destination within five years."

"It seems there's very little left for us to tell him."

"You can tell him about the weapons systems. He has to know enough to make intelligent decisions."

"Ah. We can be useful after all, how very kind, We've devoted one of the five simulators to his exclusive use."

"What about the others?"

"The other simulators?"

"The other children."

"You were brought here to take care of Ender Wiggin."

"Just curious. Remember, they were all my students at

one time or another."

"And now they are all mine. They are entering into the mysteries of the fleet, Colonel Graff, to which you, as a soldier, have never been introduced."

"You make it sound like a priesthood."

"And a god. And a religion. Even those of us who command by ansible know the majesty of flight among the stars. I can see you find my mysticism distasteful. I assure you that your distaste only reveals your ignorance. Soon enough Ender Wiggin will also know what I know; he will dance the graceful ghost dance through the stars, and whatever greatness there is within him will be unlocked, revealed, set forth before the universe far all to see. You have the soul of a stone, Colonel Graff, but I sing to a stone as easily as to another singer. You may go to your quarters and establish yourself."

"I have nothing to establish except the clothing I'm wearing."

"You own nothing?"

"They keep my salary in an account somewhere on Earth. I've never needed it. Except to buy civilian clothes on my vacation."

"A non-materialist. And yet you are unpleasantly fat. A gluttonous ascetic? Such a contradiction."

"When I'm tense, I eat. Whereas when you're tense, you spout solid waste."

"I like you, Colonel Graff. I think we shall get along."

"I don't much care, Admiral Chamrajnagar. I came here for Ender. And neither of us came here for you."

Ender hated Eros from the moment he shuttled down from the tug. He had been uncomfortable enough on Earth, where floors were flat; Eros was hopeless. It was a roughly spindle-shaped rock only six and a half kilometers thick at its narrowest point. Since the surface of the planet was entirely devoted to absorbing sunlight and converting it to energy, everyone lived in the smooth-walled rooms linked by tunnels that laced the interior of the asteroid. The closed-in space was no problem for Ender -- what bothered him was that all the tunnel floors noticeably sloped downward. From the start, Ender was plagued by vertigo as he walked through the tunnels, especially the ones that girdled Eros's narrow circumference. It did not help that gravity was only half of Earth-normal -- the illusion of being on the verge of falling

was almost complete. There was also something disturbing about the proportions of the rooms -- the ceilings were too low for the width, the tunnels too narrow. It was not a comfortable place.

Worst of all, though, was the number of people. Ender had no important memories of cities of Earth. His idea of a comfortable number of people was the Battle School, where he had known by sight every person who dwelt there. Here, though, ten thousand people lived within the rock. There was no crowding, despite the amount of space devoted to life support and other machinery. What bothered Ender was that he was constantly surrounded by strangers.

They never let him come to know anyone. He saw the other Command School students often, but since be never attended any class regularly, they remained only faces. He would attend a lecture here or there, but usually he was tutored by one teacher after another, or occasionally helped to learn a process by another student, whom he met once and never saw again. He ate alone or with Colonel Graff. His recreation was in a gym, but he rarely saw the same people in it twice.

He recognized that they were isolating him again, this time not by setting the other students to hating him, but rather by giving them no opportunity to become friends. He could hardly have been close to most of them anyway -- except for Ender, the other students were all well into adolescence.

So Ender withdrew into his studies and learned quickly and well. Astrogation and military history he absorbed like water; abstract mathematics was more difficult, but whenever he was given a problem that involved patterns in space and time, he found that his intuition was more reliable than his calculation -- he often saw at once a solution that he could only prove after minutes or hours of manipulating numbers.

And for pleasure, there was the simulator, the most perfect videogame he had ever played. Teachers and students trained him, step by step, in its use. At first, not knowing the awesome power of the game, he had played only at the tactical level, controlling a single fighter in continuous maneuvers to find and destroy an enemy. The computer-controlled enemy was devious and powerful, and whenever Ender tried a tactic he found the computer using it against him within minutes.

The game was a holographic display, and his fighter was represented only by a tiny light. The enemy was another light of a different color, and they danced and spun and maneuvered through a cube of space that must have been ten meters to a side. The controls were powerful. He could rotate the display in any direction, so he could watch from any angle, and he could move the center so that the duel took place nearer or farther from him.

Gradually, as he became more adept at controlling the fighter's speed, direction of movement, orientation, and weapons, the game was made more complex. He might have two enemy ships at once; there might be obstacles, the debris of space; he began to have to worry about fuel and limited weapons; the computer began to assign him particular things to destroy or accomplish, so that he had to avoid distractions and achieve an objective in order to win.

When he had mastered the one-fighter game, they allowed him to step back into the four-fighter squadron. He spoke commands to simulated pilots of four fighters, and instead of merely carrying out the computer's instructions, he was allowed to determine tactics himself, deciding which of several objectives was the most valuable and directing his squadron accordingly. At any time he could take personal command of one of the fighters for a short time, and at first he did this often; when he did, however, the other three fighters in his squadron were soon destroyed, and as the games became harder and harder he had to spend more and more of his time commanding the squadron. When he did, he won more and more often.

By the time he had been at Command School for a year, he was adept at running the simulator at any of fifteen levels, from controlling an individual fighter to commanding a fleet. He had long since realized that as the battleroom was to Battle School, so the simulator was to Command School. The classes were valuable, but the real education was the game. People dropped in from time to time to watch him play. They never spoke -- hardly anyone ever did, unless they had something specific to teach him. The watchers would stay, silently, watching him run through a difficult simulation, and then leave just as he finished. What are you doing, he wanted to ask. Judging me? Determining whether you want to trust the fleet to me? Just remember that I didn't ask for it.

He found that a great deal of what he learned at Battle School transferred to the simulator. He would routinely

reorient the simulator every few minutes, rotating it so that he didn't get trapped into an up-down orientation, constantly reviewing his position from the enemy point of view. It was exhilarating at last to have such control over the battle, to be able to see every point of it.

It was also frustrating to have so little control, too, for the computer-controlled fighters were only as good as the computer allowed. They took no initiative. They had no intelligence. He began to wish for his toon leaders, so that he could count on some of the squadrons doing well without having his constant supervision.

At the end of his first year he was winning every battle on the simulator, and played the game as if the machine were a natural part of his body. One day, eating a meal with Graff, he asked, "Is that all the simulator does?"

"Is what all?"

"The way it plays now, It's easy, and it hasn't got any harder for a while."

"Oh."

Graff seemed unconcerned. But then, Graff always seemed unconcerned. The next day everything changed. Graff went away, and in his place they gave Ender a companion.

He was in the room when Ender awoke in the morning. He was an old man, sitting cross-legged on the floor. Ender looked at him expectantly, waiting for the man to speak. He said nothing. Ender got up and showered and dressed, content to let the man keep his silence if he wanted. He had long since learned that when something unusual was going on, something that was part of someone else's plan and not his own, he would find out more information by waiting than by asking. Adults almost always lost their patience before Ender did.

The man still hadn't spoken when Ender was ready and went to the door to leave the room. The door didn't open. Ender turned to face the man sitting on the floor. He looked to be about sixty, by far the oldest man Ender had seen on Eros. He had a day's growth of white whiskers that grizzled his face only slightly less than his close-cut hair. His face sagged a little and his eyes were surrounded by creases and lines. He looked at Ender with an expression that bespoke only apathy.

Ender turned back to the door and tried again to open it.

“All right,” he said, giving up. "Why's the door locked?”

The old man continued to look at him blankly.

So this is a game, thought Ender. Well, if they want me to go to class, they'll unlock the door. If they don't, they won't. I don't care.

Ender didn't like games where the rules could be anything and the objective was known to them alone. So he wouldn't play. He also refused to get angry. He went through a relaxing exercise as he leaned on the door, and soon he was calm again. The old man continued to watch him impassively.

It seemed to go on for hours, Ender refusing to speak, the old man seeming to be a mindless mute.

Sometimes Ender wondered if he were mentally ill, escaped from some medical ward somewhere in Eros, living out some insane fantasy here in Ender's room. But the longer it went on, with no one coming to the door, no one looking for him, the more certain he became that this was something deliberate, meant to disconcert him. Ender did not want to give the old man the victory. To pass the time he began to do exercises. Some were impossible without the gym equipment, but others, especially from his personal defense class, he could do without any aids.

The exercises moved him around the room. He was practicing lunges and kicks. One move took him near the old man, as he had come near him before, but this time the old claw shot out and seized Ender's left leg in the middle of a kick. It pulled Ender off his feet and landed him heavily on the floor.

Ender leapt to his feet immediately, furious. He found the old man sitting calmly, cross-legged, not breathing heavily, as if he had never moved. Ender stood poised to fight, but the other's immobility made it impossible for Ender to attack. What, kick the old man's head off? And then explain it to Graff -- oh, the old man kicked me, and I had to get even.

He went back to his exercises; the old man kept watching.

Finally, tired and angry at this wasted day, a prisoner in his room, Ender went back to his bed to get his desk. As he leaned over to pick up the desk, he felt a hand jab roughly between his thighs and another hand grab his hair. In a moment he had been turned upside down. His face and

shoulders were being pressed into the floor by the old man's knee, while his back was excruciatingly bent and his legs were pinioned by the old man's arm.

Ender was helpless to use his arms, he couldn't bend his back to gain slack so he could use his legs. In less than two seconds the old man had completely defeated Ender Wiggin.

“All right,” Ender gasped. "You win.”

The man's knee thrust painfully downward. “Since when,” asked the man, his voice soft and rasping, "do you have to tell the enemy when be has won?”

Ender remained silent.

"I surprised you once, Ender Wiggin. Why didn't you destroy the immediately afterward? Just because I looked peaceful? You turned your back on me. Stupid. You have learned nothing. You have never had a teacher.”

Ender was angry now, and made no attempt to control or conceal it. "I've had too many teachers, how was I supposed to know you'd turn out to be a--”

“Au enemy, Ender Wiggin,” whispered the old man. "I am your enemy, the first one you've ever had who was smarter than you. There is no teacher but the enemy. No one but the enemy will ever tell you what the enemy is going to do. No one but the enemy will ever teach you how to destroy and conquer. Only the enemy shows you where you are weak. Only the enemy tells you where he is strong. And the only rules of the game are what you can do to him and what you can stop him from doing to you. I am your enemy from now on. From now on I am your teacher.”

Then the old man let Ender's legs fall. Because he still held Ender's head to the floor, the boy couldn't use his arms to compensate, and his legs hit the surface with a loud crack and a sickening pain. Then the old man stood and let Ender rise.

Slowly Ender pulled his legs under him, with a faint groan of pain. He knelt on all fours for a moment, recovering. Then his right arm flashed out, reaching for his enemy. The old man quickly danced back, and Ender's hand closed on air as his teacher's foot shot forward to catch Ender on the chin.

Ender's chin wasn't there. He was lying flat on his back, spinning on the floor, and during the moment that his teacher was off balance from his kick, Ender's feet smashed into the old man's other leg. He fell in a heap -- but close enough to strike out and hit Ender in the face. Ender couldn't find an arm or a leg that held still long enough to be

grabbed, and in the meantime blows were landing on his back and arms. Ender was smaller -- he couldn't reach past the old man's flailing limbs. Finally he managed to pull away and scramble back near the door.

The old man was sitting cross-legged again, but now the apathy was gone. He was smiling. "Better, this time, boy. But slow. You will have to be better with a fleet than you are with your body or no one will be safe with you in command. Lesson learned?"

Ender nodded slowly. He ached in a hundred places.

"Good," said the old man. "Then we'll never have to have such a battle again. All the rest with the simulator. I will program your battles now, not the computer; I will devise the strategy of your enemy, and you will learn to be quick and discover what tricks the enemy has for you. Remember, boy. From now on the enemy is more clever than you. From now on the enemy is stronger than you. From now on you are always about to lose."

The old man's face grew serious again. "You will be about to lose, Ender, but you will win. You will learn to defeat the enemy. He will teach you how."

The teacher got up. "In this school, it has always been the practice for a young student to be chosen by an older student. The two become companions, and the older boy teaches the younger one everything he knows. Always they fight, always they compete, always they are together. I have chosen you."

Ender spoke as the old man walked to the door. "You're too old to be a student."

"One is never too old to be a student of the enemy. I have learned from the buggers. You will learn from me."

As the old man palmed the door open, Ender leaped into the air and kicked him in the small of the back with both feet. He hit hard enough that he rebounded onto his feet, as the old man cried out and collapsed on the floor.

The old man got up slowly, holding onto the door handle, his face contorted with pain. He seemed disabled, but Ender didn't trust him. Yet in spite of his suspicion, he was caught off guard by the old man's speed. In a moment he found himself on the floor near the opposite wall, his nose and lip bleeding where his face had hit the bed. He was able to turn enough to see the old man standing in the doorway, wincing and holding his back. The old man grinned.

Ender grinned back. "Teacher," he said. "Do you have a

name?"

"Mazer Rackham," said the old man. Then he was gone.

From then on, Ender was either with Mazer Rackham or alone. The old man rarely spoke, but he was there; at meals, at tutorials, at the simulator, in his room at night. Sometimes Mazer would leave, but always, when Mazer wasn't there, the door was locked, and no one came until Mazer returned. Ender went through a week in which he called him Jailor Rackham, Mazer answered to the name as readily as to his own, and showed no sign that it bothered him at all. Ender soon gave it up.

There were compensations -- Mazer took Ender through the videos of the old battles from the First Invasion and the disastrous defeats of the I.F. in the Second Invasion. These were not pieced together from the censored public videos, but whole and continuous. Since many videos were working in the major battles, they studied bugger tactics and strategies from many angles. For the first time in his life, a teacher was pointing out things that Ender had not already seen for himself. For the first time, Ender had found a living mind he could admire.

"Why aren't you dead?" Ender asked him. "You fought your battle seventy years ago. I don't think you're even sixty years old."

"The miracles of relativity," said Mazer. "They kept me here for twenty years after the battle, even though I begged them to let me command one of the starships they launched against the bugger home planet and the bugger colonies. Then they -- came to understand some things about the way soldiers behave in the stress of battle."

"What things?"

"You've never been taught enough psychology to understand. Enough to say that they realized that even though I would never be able to command the fleet -- I'd be dead before the fleet even arrived -- I was still the only person able to understand the things I understood about the buggers. I was, they realized, the only person who had ever defeated the buggers by intelligence rather than luck. They needed me here to-- teach the person who would command the fleet."

"So they sent you out in a starship, got you up to a

relativistic speed--"

"And then I turned around and came home. A very dull voyage, Ender. Fifty years in space. Officially, only eight years passed for me, but it felt like five hundred. All so I could teach the next commander everything I knew."

"Am I to be the commander, then?"

"Let's say that you're our best bet at present."

"There are others being prepared, too?"

"No."

"That makes me the only choice, then, doesn't it'?"

Mazer shrugged.

"Except you. You're still alive, aren't you? Why not you?"

Mazer shook his head.

"Why not? You won before."

"I cannot be the commander for good and sufficient reasons."

"Show me how you beat the buggers, Mazer."

Mazer's face went inscrutable.

"You've shown me every other battle seven times at least. I think I've seen ways to beat what the buggers did before, but you've never shown me how you actually did beat them."

"The video is a very tightly kept secret, Ender."

"I know. I've pieced it together, partly. You, with your tiny reserve force, and their armada, those great big heavy-bellied starships launching their swarms of fighters. You dart in at one ship, fire at it, an explosion. That's where they always stop the clips. After that, it's just soldiers going into bugger ships and already finding them dead inside."

Mazer grinned. "So much for tightly kept secrets. Come on, let's watch the video."

They were alone in the video room, and Ender palmed the door locked. "All right, let's watch."

The video showed exactly what Ender had pieced together. Mazer's suicidal plunge into the heart of the enemy formation, the single explosion, and then--

Nothing. Mazer's ship went on, dodged the shock wave, and wove his way among the other bugger ships. They did not fire on him. They did not change course. Two of them crashed into each other and exploded a needless collision that either pilot could have avoided. Neither made the slightest movement.

Mazer sped up the action. Skipped ahead. "We waited for three hours," he said. "Nobody could believe it." Then the

I.F. ships began approaching the bugger starships. Marines began their cutting and boarding operations. The videos showed the buggers already dead at their posts.

“So you see,” said Mazer, "you already knew all there was to see.”

"Why did it happen?”

"Nobody knows. I have my personal opinions. But there are plenty of scientists who tell me I'm less than qualified to have opinions.”

"You're the one who won the battle.”

"I thought that qualified me to comment, too, but you know how it is. Xenobiologists and xenopsychologists can't accept the idea that a starpilot scooped them by sheer guesswork. I think they all hate me because, after they saw these videos, they had to live out the rest of their natural lives here on Eros. Security, you know. They weren't happy.”

"Tell me.”

"The buggers don't talk. They think to each other, and it's instantaneous like the philotic effect. Like the ansible. But most people always thought that meant a controlled communication like language -- I think you a thought and then you answer me. I never believed that. It's too immediate, the way they respond together to things. You've seen the videos. They aren't conversing and deciding among possible courses of action. Every ship acts like part of a single organism. It responds the way your body responds during combat, different parts automatically, thoughtlessly doing everything they're supposed to do. They aren't having a mental conversation between people with different thought processes. All their thoughts are present, together, at once.”

"A single person, and each bugger is like a hand or a foot?”

"Yes. I wasn't the first person to suggest it, but I was the first person to believe it. And something else. Something so childish and stupid that the xenobiologists laughed me to silence when I said it after the battle. The buggers are bugs. They're like ants and bees. A queen, the workers. That was maybe a hundred million years ago, but that's how they started, that kind of pattern. It's a sure thing none of the buggers we saw had any way of making more little buggers. So when they evolved this ability to think together, wouldn't they still keep the queen? Wouldn't the queen still be the center of the group? Why would that ever change?”

"So it's the queen who controls the whole group.”

"I had evidence, too. Not evidence that any of them could see. it wasn't there in the First Invasion, because that was exploratory. But the Second Invasion was a colony. To set up a new hive, or whatever."

"And so they brought a queen."

"The videos of the Second Invasion, when they were destroying our fleets out in the comet shell." He began to call them up and display the buggers' patterns. "Show me the queen's ship."

It was subtle. Ender couldn't see it for a long time. The bugger ships kept moving, all of them. There was no obvious flagship, no apparent nerve center. But gradually, as Mazer played the videos over and over again, Ender began to see the way that all the movements focused on, radiated from a center point. The center point shifted, but it was obvious, after he looked long enough, that the eyes of the fleet, the I of the fleet, the perspective from which all decisions were being made, was one particular ship. He pointed it out.

"You see it. I see it. That makes two people out of all of those who have seen this video. But it's true, isn't it."

"They make that ship move just like any other ship."

"They know it's their weak point."

"But you're right. That's the queen. But then you'd think that when you went for it, they would have immediately focused all their power on you. They could have blown you out of the sky."

"I know. That part I don't understand. Not that they didn't try to stop me -- they were firing at me. But it's as if they really couldn't believe, until it was too late, that I would actually kill the queen. Maybe in their world, queens are never killed, only captured, only checkmated. I did something they didn't think an enemy would ever do."

"And when she died the others all died,"

"No, they just went stupid. The first ships we boarded, the buggers were still alive. Organically. But they didn't move, didn't respond to anything, even when our scientists vivisected some of them to see if we could learn a few more things about buggers. After a while they all died. No will. There's nothing in those little bodies when the queen is gone."

"Why don't they believe you?"

"Because we didn't find a queen."

"She got blown to pieces."

"Fortunes of war. Biology takes second place to survival.

But some of them are coming around to my way of thinking. You can't live in this place without the evidence staring you in the face."

"What evidence is there in Eros?"

"Ender, look around you. Human beings didn't carve this place. We like taller ceilings, for one thing. This was the buggers' advance post in the First Invasion. They carved this place out before we even knew they were here. We're living in a bugger hive. But we already paid our rent. It cost the marines a thousand lives to clear them out of these honeycombs, room by room. The buggers fought for every meter of it."

Now Ender understood why the rooms had always felt wrong to him. "I knew this wasn't a human place."

"This was the treasure trove. If they had known we would win that first war, they probably' would never have built this place. We learned gravity manipulation because they enhanced the gravity here. We learned efficient use of stellar energy because they blacked out this planet. In fact, that's how we discovered them. In a period of three days, Eros gradually disappeared from telescopes. We sent a tug to find out why. It found out. The tug transmitted its videos, including the buggers boarding and slaughtering the crew. It kept right on transmitting through the entire bugger examination of the boat. Not until they finally dismantled the entire tug did the transmissions stop. It was their blindness -- they never had to transmit anything by machine, and so with the crew dead, it didn't occur to them that anybody could be watching."

"Why did they kill the crew?"

"Why not? To them, losing a few crew members would be like clipping your nails. Nothing to get upset about. They probably thought they were routinely shutting down our communications by turning off the workers running the tug. Not murdering living, sentient beings with an independent genetic future. Murder's no big deal to them. Only queen-killing, really, is murder, because only queen-killing closes off a genetic path."

"So they didn't know what they were doing."

"Don't start apologizing for them, Ender. Just because they didn't know they were killing human beings doesn't mean they weren't killing human beings. We do have a right to defend ourselves as best we can, and the only way we found that works is killing the buggers before they kill us.

Think of it this way. In all the bugger wars so far, they've killed thousands and thousands of living, thinking beings. And in all those wars, we've killed only one."

"If you hadn't killed the queen, Mazer, would we have lost the war?"

"I'd say the odds would have been three to two against us. I still think I could have trashed their fleet pretty badly before they burned us out. They have great response time and a lot of firepower, but we have a few advantages, too. Every single one of our ships contains an intelligent human being who's thinking on his own. Every one of us is capable of coming up with a brilliant solution to a problem. They can only come up with one brilliant solution at a time. The buggers think fast, but they aren't smart all over. But on our side, even when some incredibly timid and stupid commanders lost the major battles of the Second Invasion, some of their subordinates were able to do real damage to the bugger fleet."

"What about when our invasion reaches them? Will we just get the queen again?"

"The buggers didn't learn interstellar travel by being dumb. That was a strategy that could work only once. I suspect that we'll never get near a queen unless we actually make it to their home planet. After all, the queen doesn't have to be with them to direct a battle. The queen only has to be present to have little baby buggers. The Second invasion was a colony -- the queen was coming to populate the Earth. But this time -- no, that won't work. We'll have to beat them fleet by fleet. And because they have the resources of dozens of star systems to draw on, my guess is they'll outnumber us by a lot, in every battle."

Ender remembered his battle against two armies at once. And I thought they were cheating. When the real war begins, it'll be like that every time. And there won't be any gate I can go for.

"We've only got two things going for us, Ender. We don't have to aim particularly well. Our weapons have great spread."

"Then we aren't using the nuclear missiles from the First and Second Invasions?"

"Dr. Device is much more powerful. Nuclear weapons, after all, were weak enough to be used on Earth at one time. The Little Doctor could never be used on a planet. Still, I wish I'd had one during the Second Invasion."

"How does it work?"

"I don't know, not well enough to build one. At the focal point of two beams, it sets up a field in which molecules can't hold together anymore. Electrons can't be shared. How much physics do you know, at that level?"

"We spend most of our time on astrophysics, but I know enough to get the idea."

"The field spreads out in a sphere, but it gets weaker the farther it spreads. Except that where it actually runs into a lot of molecules, it gets stronger and starts over. The bigger the ship, the stronger the new field."

"So each time the field hits a ship, it sends out a new sphere--"

"And if their ships are too close together, it can set up a chain that wipes them all out. Then the field dies down, the molecules come back together, and where you had a ship, you now have a lump of dirt with a lot of iron molecules in it. No radioactivity, no mess. Just dirt. We may be able to trap them close together on the first battle, but they learn fast. They'll keep their distance from each other."

"So Dr. Device isn't a missile -- I can't shoot around corners.

"That's right. Missiles wouldn't do any good now. We learned a lot from them in the First Invasion, but they also learned from us -- how to set up the Ecstatic Shield, for instance."

"The Little Doctor penetrates the shield?"

"As if it weren't there. You can't see through the shield to aim and focus the beams, but since the generator of the Ecstatic Shield is always in the exact center, it isn't hard to figure it out."

"Why haven't I ever been trained with this?"

"You always have. We just let the computer tend to it for you. Your job is to get into a superior strategic position and choose a target. The shipboard computers are much better at aiming the Doctor than you are."

"Why is it called Dr. Device?"

"When it was developed, it was called a Molecular Detachment Device. M.D. Device."

Ender still didn't understand.

"M.D. The initials stand for Medical Doctor, too. M.D. Device, therefore Dr. Device. It was a joke." Ender didn't see what was funny about it.

They had changed the simulator. He could still control the perspective and the degree of detail, but there were no ship's controls anymore. Instead, it was a new panel of levers, and a small headset with earphones and a small microphone.

The technician who was waiting there quickly explained how to wear the headset.

“But how do I control the ships?” asked Ender.

Mazer explained. He wasn't going to control ships anymore. "You've reached the next phase of your training. You have experience in every level of strategy, but now it's time for you to concentrate on commanding an entire fleet. As you worked with toon leaders in Battle School, so now you will work with squadron leaders. You have been assigned three dozen such leaders to train. You must teach them intelligent tactics; you must learn their strengths and limitations; you must make them into a whole.”

"When will they come here?”

"They're already in place in their own simulators. You will speak to them through the headset. The new levers on your control panel enable you to see from the perspective of any of your squadron leaders. This more closely duplicates the conditions you might encounter in a real battle, where you will only know what your ships can see.”

"How can I work with squadron leaders I never see?”

"And why would you need to see them?”

"To know who they are, how they think--”

"You'll learn who they are and how they think from the way they work with the simulator. But even so, I think you won't be concerned. They're listening to you right now. Put on the headset so you can hear them.”

Ender put on the headset.

“Salaam,” said a whisper in his ears.

“Alai,” said Ender.

"And me, the dwarf.”

"Bean.”

And Petra, and Dink; Crazy Tom, Shen, Hot Soup, Fly Molo, all the best students Ender had fought with or fought against, everyone that Ender had trusted in Battle School. “I didn't know you were here,” he said, "I didn't know you were coming.”

“They've been flogging us through the simulator for three months now,” said Dink.

“You'll find that I'm by far the best tactician,” said Petra. "Dink tries, but he has the mind of a child.”

So they began working together, each squadron leader commanding individual pilots, and Ender commanding the squadron leaders. They learned many ways of working together, as the simulator forced them to try different situations. Sometimes the simulator gave them a larger fleet to work with; Ender set them up then in three or four toons that consisted of three or four squadrons each. Sometimes the simulator gave them a single starship with its twelve fighters, and he chose three squadron leaders with four fighters each.

It was pleasure; it was play. The computer-controlled enemy was none too bright, and they always won despite their mistakes, their miscommunications. But in the three weeks they practiced together, Ender came to know them very well. Dink, who deftly carried out instructions but was slow to improvise; Bean, who couldn't control large groups of ships effectively but could use only a few like a scalpel, reacting beautifully to anything the computer threw at him; Alai, who was almost as good a strategist as Ender and could be entrusted to do well with half a fleet and only vague instructions.

The better Ender knew them, the faster he could deploy them, the better he could use them. The simulator would display the situation on the screen. In that moment Ender learned for the first time what his own fleet would consist of and how the enemy fleet was deployed. It took him only a few minutes now to call for the squadron leaders that he needed, assign them to certain ships or groups of ships, and give them their assignments. Then, as the battle progressed, he would skip from one leader's point of view to another's, making suggestions and, occasionally, giving orders as the need arose. Since the others could only see their own battle perspective, he would sometimes give them orders that made no sense to them; but they, too, learned to trust Ender. If he told them to withdraw, they withdrew, knowing that either they were in an exposed position, or their withdrawal might entice the enemy into a weakened posture. They also knew that Ender trusted them to do as they judged best when he gave them no orders. If their style of fighting were not right for the situation they were placed in, Ender would not have chosen them for that assignment.

The trust was complete, the working of the fleet quick and responsive. And at the end of three weeks, Mazer showed

him a replay of their most recent battle, only this time from the enemy's point of view.

"This is what he saw as you attacked. What does it remind you of? The quickness of response, for instance?"

"We look like a bugger fleet."

"You match them, Ender. You're as fast as they are. And here -- look at this."

Ender watched as all his squadrons moved at once, each responding to its own situation, all guided by Ender's overall command, but daring, improvising, feinting, attacking with an independence no bugger fleet had ever shown.

"The bugger hive-mind is very good, but it can only concentrate on a few things at once. All your squadrons can concentrate a keen intelligence on what they're doing, and what they've been assigned to do is also guided by a clever mind. So you see that you do have some advantages. Superior, though not irresistible, weaponry; comparable speed and greater available intelligence. These are your advantages. Your disadvantage is that you will always, always be outnumbered, and after each battle your enemy will learn more about you, how to fight you, and those changes will be put into effect instantly."

Ender waited for his conclusion.

"So, Ender, we will now begin your education. We have programmed the computer to simulate the kinds of situations we might expect in encounters with the enemy. We are using the movement patterns we saw in the Second Invasion. But instead of mindlessly following these same patterns, I will be controlling the enemy simulation. At first you will see easy situations that you are expected to win handily. Learn from them, because I will always be there, one step ahead of you, programming more difficult and advanced patterns into the computer so that your next battle is more difficult, so that you are pushed to the limit of your abilities."

"And beyond?"

"The time is short. You must learn as quickly as you can. When I gave myself to starship travel, just so I would still be alive when you appeared, my wife and children all died, and my grandchildren were my own age when I came back. I had nothing to say to them. I was cut off from all the people that I loved, everything I knew, living in this alien catacomb and forced to do nothing of importance but teach student after student, each one so hopeful, each one, ultimately, a weakling, a failure. I teach, I teach, but no one learns. You,

too, have great promise, like so many students before you, but the seeds of failure may be in you, too. It's my job to find them, to destroy you if I can, and believe me, Ender, if you can be destroyed I can do it."

"So I'm not the first."

"No, of course you're not. But you're the last. If you don't learn, there'll be no time to find anyone else. So I have hope for you, only because you are the only one left to hope for."

"What about the others? My squadron leaders?"

"Which of them is fit to take your place?"

"Alai."

"Be honest."

Ender had no answer, then.

"I am not a happy man, Ender. Humanity does not ask us to be happy. It merely asks us to be brilliant on its behalf. Survival first, then happiness as we can manage it. So, Ender, I hope you do not bore me during your training with complaints that you are not having fun. Take what pleasure you can in the interstices of your work, but your work is first, learning is first, winning is everything because without it there is nothing. When you can give me back my dead wife, Ender, then you can complain to me about what this education costs you."

"I wasn't trying to get out of anything."

"But you will, Ender. Because I am going to grind you down to dust, if I can. I'm going to hit you with everything I can imagine, and I will have no mercy, because when you face the buggers they will think of things I can't imagine, and compassion for human beings is impossible for them."

"You can't grind me down, Mazer."

"Oh, can't I?"

"Because I'm stronger than you."

Mazer smiled. "We'll see about that, Ender."

Mazer wakened him before morning; the clock said 0340, and Ender felt groggy as he padded along the corridor behind Mazer. "Early to bed and early to rise," Mazer intoned, "makes a man stupid and blind in the eyes."

He had been dreaming that buggers were vivisecting him. Only instead of cutting open his body, they were cutting up his memories and displaying them like holographs and trying to make sense of them. It was a very odd dream, and

Ender couldn't easily shake loose of it, even as he walked through the tunnels to the simulator room. The buggers tormented him in his sleep, and Mazer wouldn't leave him alone when he was awake. Between the two of them he had no rest. Ender forced himself awake. Apparently Mazer meant it when he said he meant to break Ender down -- and forcing him to play when tired and sleepy was just the sort of cheap and easy trick Ender should have expected. Well, today it wouldn't work.

He got to the simulator and found his squadron leaders already on the wire, waiting for him. There was no enemy yet, so he divided them into two armies and began a mock battle, commanding both sides so he could control the test that each of his leaders was going through. They began slowly, but soon were vigorous and alert.

Then the simulator field went blank, the ships disappeared, and everything changed at once. At the near edge of the simulator field they could see the shapes, drawn in holographic light, of three starships from the human fleet. Each would have twelve fighters. The enemy, obviously aware of the human presence, had formed a globe with a single ship at the center. Ender was not fooled -- it would not be a queen ship. The buggers outnumbered Ender's fighter force by two to one, but they were also grouped much closer together than they should have been -- Dr. Device would be able to do much more damage than the enemy expected.

Ender selected one starship, made it blink in the simulator field, and spoke into the microphone. “Alai, this is yours; assign Petra and Vlad to the fighters as you wish.” He assigned the other two starships with their fighter forces, except for one fighter from each starship that he reserved for Bean. "Slip the wall and get below them, Bean, unless they start chasing you -- then run back to the reserves for safety. Otherwise, get in a place where I can call on you for quick results. Alai, form your force into a compact assault at one point in their globe. Don't fire until I tell you. This is maneuver only.”

“This one's easy, Ender,” Alai said.

"It's easy, so why not be careful? I'd like to do this without the loss of a single ship.”

Ender grouped his reserves in two forces that shadowed Alai at a safe distance; Bean was already off the simulator, though Ender occasionally flipped to Bean's point of view to keep track of where he was.

It was Alai, however, who played the delicate game with the enemy. He was in a bullet-shaped formation, and probed the enemy globe. Wherever he came near, the bugger ships pulled back, as if to draw him in toward the ship in the center, Alai skimmed to the side; the bugger ships kept up with him, withdrawing wherever he was close, returning to the sphere pattern when he had passed.

Feint, withdraw, skim the globe to another point, withdraw again, feint again; and then Ender said "Go on in, Alai."

His bullet started in, while he said to Ender, "You know they'll just let me through and surround me and eat me alive."

"Just ignore that ship in the middle."

"Whatever you say, boss."

Sure enough, the globe began to contract, Ender brought the reserves forward: the enemy ships concentrated on the side of the globe nearer the reserves. "Attack them there, where they're most concentrated," Ender said.

"This defies four thousand years of military history," said Alai, moving his fighters forward. "We're supposed to attack where we outnumber them."

"In this simulation they obviously don't know what our weapons can do. It'll only work once, but let's make it spectacular. Fire at will."

Alai did. The simulation responded beautifully: first one or two, then a dozen, then most of the enemy ships exploded in dazzling light as the field leapt from ship to ship in the tight formation. "Stay out of the way," Ender said.

The ships on the far side of the globe formation were not affected by the chain reaction, but it was a simple matter hunting them down and destroying them. Bean took care of stragglers that tried to escape toward his end of space -- the battle was over. It had been easier than most of their recent exercises.

Mazer shrugged when Ender told him so. "This is a simulation of a real invasion. There had to be one battle in which they didn't know what we could do. Now your work begins. Try not to be too arrogant about the victory. I'll give you the real challenges soon enough."

Ender practiced ten hours a day with his squadron leaders, but not all at once; he gave them a few hours in the afternoon to rest. Simulated battles under Mazer's supervision came every two or three days, and as Mazer had promised,

they were never so easy again. The enemy quickly abandoned its attempt to surround Ender, and never again grouped its forces closely enough to allow a chain reaction. There was something new every time, something harder. Sometimes Ender had only a single starship and eight fighters; once the enemy dodged through an asteroid belt; sometimes the enemy left stationary traps, large installations that blew up if Ender brought one of his squadrons too close, often crippling or destroying some of Ender's ships. “You cannot absorb losses!” Mazer shouted at him after one battle. "When you get into a real battle you won't have the luxury of an infinite supply of computer-generated fighters. You'll have what you brought with you and nothing more. Now get used to fighting without unnecessary waste.”

“It wasn't unnecessary waste, Ender said. ”I can't win battles if I'm so terrified of losing a ship that I never take any risks.”

Mazer smiled. “Excellent, Ender. You're beginning to learn. But in a real battle, you would have superior officers and, worst of all, civilians shouting those things at you. Now, if the enemy had been at all bright, they would have caught you here, and taken Tom's squadron.” Together they went over the battle; in the next practice, Ender would show his leaders what Mazer had shown him, and they'd learn to cope with it the next time they saw it.

They thought they had been ready before, that they had worked smoothly together as a team. Now, though, having fought through real challenges together, they all began to trust each other more than ever, and battles became exhilarating. They told Ender that the ones who weren't actually playing would come into the simulator rooms and watch. Ender imagined what it would be like to have his friends there with him, cheering or laughing or gasping with apprehension; sometimes he thought it would be a great distraction, but other times he wished for it with all his heart. Even when he had spent his days lying out in the sunlight on a raft in a lake, he had not been so lonely. Mazer Rackham was his companion, was his teacher, but was not his friend.

He said nothing, though. Mazer had told him there would be no pity, and his private unhappiness meant nothing to anyone. Most of the time it meant nothing even to Ender. He kept his mind on the game, trying to learn from the battles. And not just the particular lessons of that battle, but

what the buggers might have done if they had been more clever, and how Ender would react if they did it in the future. He lived with past battles and future battles both, waking and sleeping, and he drove his squadron leaders with an intensity that occasionally provoked rebelliousness.

“You're too kind to us,” said Alai one day. "Why don't you get annoyed with us for not being brilliant every moment of every practice. If you keep coddling us like this we'll think you like us.”

Some of the others laughed into their microphones. Ender recognized the irony, of course, and answered with a long silence. When he finally spoke, he ignored Alai's complaint. “Again,” he said, “and this time without self-pity.” They did it again, and did it right.

But as their trust in Ender as a commander grew, their friendship, remembered from the Battle School days, gradually disappeared. It was to each other that they became close; it was with each other that they exchanged confidences. Ender was their teacher and commander, as distant from them as Mazer was from him, and as demanding.

They fought all the better for it. And Ender was not distracted from his work.

At least, not while he was awake. As he drifted off to sleep each night, it was with thoughts of the simulator playing through his mind. But in the night he thought of other things. Often he remembered the corpse of the Giant, decaying steadily; he did not remember it, though, in the pixels of the picture on his desk. Instead it was real, the faint odor of death still lingering near it. Things were changed in his dreams. The little village that had grown up between the Giant's ribs was composed of buggers now, and they saluted him gravely, like gladiators greeting Caesar before they died for his entertainment. He did not hate the buggers in his dream; and even though he knew that they had hidden their queen from him, he did not try to search for her. He always left the Giant's body quickly, and when he got to the playground. the children were always there, wolven and mocking; they wore faces that he knew. Sometimes Peter and sometimes Bonzo, sometimes Stilson and Bernard; just as often, though, the savage creatures were Alai and Shen, Dink and Petra; sometimes one of them would be Valentine, and in his dream he also shoved her under the water and waited for her to drown. She writhed in his hands, fought to come up,

but at last was still. He dragged her out of the lake and onto the raft, where she lay with her face in the rictus of death, he screamed and wept over her, crying again and again that it was a game, a game. he was only playing!--

Then Mazer Rackham shook him awake. “You were calling out in your sleep,” he said.

“Sorry,” Ender said.

"Never mind. It's time for another battle.”

Steadily the pace increased. There were usually two battles a day now, and Ender held practices to a minimum. He would use the time while the others rested to pore over the replays of past games, trying to spot his own weaknesses, trying to guess what would happen next. Sometimes he was fully prepared for the enemy's innovations; sometimes he was not.

“I think you're cheating,” Ender told Mazer one day.

"Oh?”

"You can observe my practice sessions. You can see what I'm working on. You seem to be ready for everything I do.”

“Most of what you see is computer simulations,” Mazer said. "The computer is programmed to respond to your innovations only after you use them once in battle.”

"Then the computer is cheating.”

"You need to get more sleep, Ender.”

But he could not sleep. He lay awake longer and longer each night, and his sleep was less restful. He woke too often in the night. Whether he was waking up to think more about the game or to escape from his dreams, he wasn't sure. It was as if someone rode him in his sleep, forcing him to wander through his worst memories, to live in them again as if they were real. Nights were so real that days began to seem dreamlike to him. He began to worry that he would not think clearly enough, that he would be too tired when he played. Always when the game began, the intensity of it awoke him, but if his mental abilities began to slip, he wondered, would he notice it?

And he seemed to be slipping. He never had a battle anymore in which he did not lose at least a few fighters. Several times the enemy was able to trick him into exposing more weakness than he meant to; other times the enemy was able to wear him down by attrition until his victory was as much a matter of luck as strategy. Mazer would go over the game with a look of contempt on his face. “Look at this,” he would say. “You didn't have to do this.” And Ender would

return to practice with his leaders, trying to keep up their morale, but sometimes letting slip his disappointment with their weaknesses, the fact that they made mistakes.

“Sometimes we make mistakes,” Petra whispered to him once. It was a plea for help.

“And sometimes we don't,” Ender answered her. If she got help, it would not be from him. He would teach; let her find her friends among the others.

Then came a battle that nearly ended in disaster. Petra led her force too far; they were exposed, and she discovered it in a moment when Ender wasn't with her. In only a few moments she had lost all but two of her ships.

Ender found her then, ordered her to move them in a certain direction; she didn't answer. There was no movement. And in a moment those two fighters, too, would be lost.

Ender knew at once that he had pushed her too hard because of her brilliance -- he had called on her to play far more often and under much more demanding circumstances than all but a few of the others. But he had no time now to worry about Petra, or to feel guilty about what he had done to her. He called on Crazy Tom to command the two remaining fighters, then went on, trying to salvage the battle; Petra had occupied a key position, and now all of Ender's strategy came apart. If the enemy had not been too eager and clumsy at exploiting their advantage, Ender would have lost. But Shen was able to catch a group of the enemy in too tight a formation and took them out with a single chain reaction. Crazy Tom brought his two surviving fighters in through the gap and caused havoc with the enemy, and though his ships and Shen's as well were finally destroyed, Fly Molo was able to mop up and complete the victory.

At the end of the battle, he could hear Petra crying out, trying to get a microphone, "Tell him I'm sorry, I was just so tired, I couldn't think, that was all, tell Ender I'm sorry.”

She was not there for the next few practices, and when she did come back she was not as quick as she had been, not as daring. Much of what had made her a good commander was lost. Ender couldn't use her anymore, except in routine, closely supervised assignments. She was no fool. She knew what had happened. But she also knew that Ender had no other choice, and told him so.

The fact remained that she had broken, and she was far from being the weakest of his squad leaders. It was a warning -- he could not press his commanders more than they could

bear. Now, instead of using his leaders whenever he needed their skills, he had to keep in mind how often they had fought. He had to spell them off, which meant that sometimes he went into battle with commanders he trusted a little less. As he eased the pressure on them, he increased the pressure on himself.

Late one night he woke up in pain. There was blood on his pillow, the taste of blood in his mouth. His fingers were throbbing. He saw that in his sleep he had been gnawing on his own fist. The blood was still flowing smoothly. “Mazer!” he called. Rackham woke up and called at once for a doctor.

As the doctor treated the wound, Mazer said, "I don't care how much you eat, Ender, self-cannibalism won't get you out of this school.”

“I was asleep,” Ender said. "I don't want to get out of Command School.”

"Good.”

"The others. The ones who didn't make it.”

"What are you talking about?”

"Before me. Your other students, who didn't make it through the training. What happened to them?”

"They didn't make it. That's all. We don't punish the ones who fail. They just -- don't go on.”

"Like Bonzo.”

"Bonzo?”

"He went home.”

"Not like Bonzo.”

"What then? What happened to them? When they failed?”

"Why does it matter, Ender?”

Ender didn't answer.

"None of them failed at this point in their course, Ender. You made a mistake with Petra. She'll recover. But Petra is Petra, and you are you.”

"Part of what I am is her. Is what she made me.”

"You won't fail, Ender. Not this early in the course. You've had some tight ones, but you've always won. You don't know what your limits are yet, but if you've reached them already you're a good deal feebler than I thought.”

"Do they die?”

"Who?”

"The ones who fail.”

"No, they don't die. Good heavens, boy, you're playing games.”

"I think that Bonzo died. I dreamed about it last night. I remembered the way he looked after I jammed his face with my head. I think I must have pushed his nose back into his brain. The blood was coming out of his eyes. I think he was dead right then."

"It was just a dream."

"Mazer, I don't want to keep dreaming these things. I'm afraid to sleep. I keep thinking of things that I don't want to remember. My whole life keeps playing out as if I were a recorder and someone else wanted to watch the most terrible parts of my life."

"We can't drug you if that's what you're hoping for. I'm sorry if you have bad dreams. Should we leave the light on at night?"

"Don't make fun of me!" Ender said. "I'm afraid I'm going crazy."

The doctor was finished with the bandage. Mazer told him he could go. He went.

"Are you really afraid of that?" Mazer asked.

Ender thought about it and wasn't sure.

"In my dreams," said Ender, "I'm never sure whether I'm really me."

"Strange dreams are a safety valve, Ender. I'm putting you under a little pressure for the first time in your life. Your body is finding ways to compensate, that's all. You're a big boy now. It's time to stop being afraid of the night."

"All right," Ender said. He decided then that he would never tell Mazer about his dreams again.

The days wore on, with battles every day, until at last Ender settled into the routine of the destruction of himself. He began to have pains in his stomach. They put him on a bland diet, but soon he didn't have an appetite for anything at all. "Eat," Mazer said, and Ender would mechanically put food in his mouth. But if nobody told him to eat, he didn't eat.

Two more of his squadron leaders collapsed the way that Petra had; the pressure on the rest became all the greater. The enemy outnumbered them by three or four to one in every battle now; the enemy also retreated more readily when things went badly, regrouping to keep the battle going longer and longer. Sometimes battles lasted for hours before they finally destroyed the last enemy ship. Ender began rotating his squadron leaders within the same battle, bringing in fresh and rested ones to take the place of those who were

beginning to get sluggish.

“You know,” said Bean one time, as he took over command of Hot Soup's four remaining fighters, "this game isn't quite as fun as it used to be.”

Then one day in practice, as Ender was drilling his squadron leaders, the room went black and he woke up on the floor with his face bloody where he had hit the controls.

They put him to bed then, and for three days he was very ill. He remembered seeing faces in his dreams, but they weren't real faces, and he knew it even while he thought he saw them. He thought he saw Valentine sometimes, and sometimes Peter; sometimes his friends from the Battle School, and sometimes the buggers vivisecting him. Once it seemed very real when he saw Colonel Graff bending over him speaking softly to him, like a kind father. But then he woke top and found only his enemy, Mazer Rackham.

“I'm awake,” said Ender.

“So I see,” Mazer answered. "Took you long enough. You have a battle today.”

So Ender got up and fought the battle and won it. But there was no second battle that day, and they let him go to bed earlier. His hands were shaking as be undressed.

During the night he thought he felt hands touching him gently. Hands with affection in them, and gentleness. He dreamed he heard voices.

"You haven't been kind to him.”

"That wasn't the assignment.”

"How long can he go on? He's breaking down.”

"Long enough. It's nearly finished.”

"So soon?”

"A few days, and then he's through.”

"How will he do, when he's already like this?”

"Fine. Even today, he fought better than ever.”

In his dream, the voices sounded like Colonel Graff and Mazer Rackham. But that was the way dreams were, the craziest things could happen, because he dreamed he heard one of the voices saying, “I can't bear to see what this is doing to him.” And the other voice answered, “I know. I love him too.” And then they changed into Valentine and Alai, and in his dream they were burying him, only a hill grew up where they laid his body down, and he dried out and became a home for buggers, like the Giant was.

All dreams. If there was love or pity for him, it was only in his dreams.

He woke up and fought another battle and won. Then he went to bed and slept again and dreamed again and then he woke up and won again and slept again and he hardly noticed when waking became sleeping. Nor did he care.

The next day was his last day in Command School, though he didn't know it. Mazer Rackham was not in the room with him when he woke up. He showered and dressed and waited for Mazer to come unlock the door. He didn't come. Ender tried the door. It was open.

Was it an accident that Mazer had let him be free this morning? No one with him to tell him he must eat, he must go to practice, he must sleep. Freedom. The trouble was, he didn't know what to do. He thought for a moment that he might find his squadron leaders, talk to them face to face, but he didn't know where they were. They could be twenty kilometers away, for all he knew. So, after wandering through the tunnels for a little while, he went to the mess hall and ate breakfast near a few marines who were telling dirty jokes that Ender could not begin to understand. Then he went to the simulator room for practice. Even though he was free, he could not think of anything else to do.

Mazer was waiting for him. Ender walked slowly into the room. His step was slightly shuffling, and he felt tired and dull.

Mazer frowned. "Are you awake, Ender?"

There were other people in the simulator room. Ender wondered why they were there, but didn't bother to ask. It wasn't worth asking; no one would tell him anyway. He walked to the simulator controls and sat down, ready to start.

"Ender Wiggin," said Mazer. "Please turn around. Today's game needs a little explanation."

Ender turned around. He glanced at the men gathered at the back of the room. Most of them he had never seen before. Some were even dressed in civilian clothes. He saw Anderson and wondered what he was doing there, who was taking care of the Battle School if he was gone. He saw Graff and remembered the lake in the woods outside Greensboro, and wanted to go home. Take me home, he said silently to Graff. In my dream you said you loved me. Take me home.

But Graff only nodded to him, a greeting, not a promise, and Anderson acted as though he didn't know him at all.

"Pay attention, please, Ender. Today is your final examination in Command School. These observers are here to evaluate what you have learned. If you prefer not to have

them in the room, we'll have them watch on another simulator."

"They can stay." Final examination. After today, perhaps he could rest.

"For this to be a fair test of your ability, not just to do what you have practiced many times, but also to meet challenges you have never seen before, today's battle introduces a new element. It is staged around a planet. This will affect the enemy's strategy, and will force you to improvise. Please concentrate on the game today."

Ender beckoned Mazer closer, and asked him quietly, "Am I the first student to make it this far?"

"If you win today, Ender, you will be the first student to do so. More than that I'm not at liberty to say."

"Well, I'm at liberty to hear it."

"You can be as petulant as you want, tomorrow. Today, though, I'd appreciate it if you would keep your mind on the examination. Let's not waste all that you've already done. Now, how will you deal with the planet?"

"I have to get someone behind it, or it's a blind spot."

"True."

"And the gravity is going to affect fuel levels -- cheaper to go down than up."

"Yes."

"Does the Little Doctor work against a planet?"

Mazer's face went rigid. "Ender, the buggers never attacked a civilian population in either invasion. You decide whether it would be wise to adopt a strategy that would invite reprisals."

"Is the planet the only new thing?"

"Can you remember the last time I've given you a battle with only one new thing? Let me assure you, Ender, that I will not be kind to you today. I have a responsibility to the fleet not to let a second-rate student graduate. I will do my best against you, Ender, and I have no desire to coddle you. Just keep in mind everything you know about yourself and everything you know about the buggers, and you have a fair chance of amounting to something."

Mazer left the room.

Ender spoke into the microphone. "Are you there?"

"All of us," said Bean. "Kind of late for practice this morning, aren't you?"

So they hadn't told the squadron leaders. Ender toyed with the idea of telling them how important this battle was

to him, but decided it would not help them to have an extraneous concern on their minds. “Sorry,” he said. "I overslept.”

They laughed. They didn't believe him.

He led them through maneuvers, warming up for the battle ahead. It took him longer than usual to clear his mind, to concentrate on command, but soon enough he was up to speed, responding quickly, thinking well. Or at least, he told himself, thinking that I'm thinking well.

The simulator field cleared. Ender waited for the game to appear. What will happen if I pass the test today?

Is there another school? Another year or two of grueling training, another year of isolation, another year of people pushing me this way and that way, another year without any control over my own life? He tried to remember how old he was. Eleven. How many years ago did he turn eleven? How many days? It must have happened here at the Command School, but he couldn't remember the day. Maybe he didn't even notice it at the time. Nobody noticed it, except perhaps Valentine.

And as he waited for the game to appear, he wished he could simply lose it, lose the battle badly and completely so that they would remove him from training, like Bonzo, and let him go home. Bonzo had been assigned to Cartagena. He wanted to see travel orders that said Greensboro. Success meant it would go on. Failure meant he could go home.

No, that isn't true, he told himself. They need me, and if I fail there might not be any home to return to.

But he did not believe it. In his conscious mind he knew it was true, but in other places, deeper places, he doubted that they needed him. Mazer's urgency was just another trick. Just another way to make me do what they want me to do. Another way to keep him from resting. From doing nothing, for a long, long time.

Then the enemy formation appeared, and Ender's weariness turned to despair.

The enemy outnumbered him a thousand to one, the simulator glowed green with them. They were grouped in a dozen different formations shifting positions, changing shapes, moving in seemingly random patterns through the simulator field. He could not find a path through them -- a space that seemed open would close suddenly, and another appear, and a formation that seemed penetrable would suddenly change and be forbidding. The planet was at the far

edge of the field, and for all Ender knew there were just as many enemy ships beyond it, out of the simulator's range.

As for his own fleet, it consisted of twenty starships, each with only four fighters. He knew the four-fighter starships they were old-fashioned, sluggish, and the range of their Little Doctors was half that of the newer ones. Eighty fighters, against at least five thousand, perhaps ten thousand enemy ships.

He heard his squadron leaders breathing heavily; he could also hear, from the observers behind him, a quiet curse. It was nice to know that one of the adults noticed that it wasn't a fair test. Not that it made any difference. Fairness wasn't part of the game, that was plain. There was no attempt to give him even a remote chance at success. All that I've been through, and they never meant to let me pass at all.

He saw in his mind Bonzo and his vicious little knot of friends, confronting him, threatening him; he had been able to shame Bonzo into fighting him alone. That would hardly work here. And he could not surprise the enemy with his ability as he had done with the older boys in the battleroom. Mazer knew Ender's abilities inside and out.

The observers behind him began to cough, to move nervously. They were beginning to realize that Ender didn't know what to do.

I don't care anymore, thought Ender. You can keep your game. If you won't even give me a chance, why should I play?

Like his last game in Battle School, when they put two armies against him.

And just as he remembered that game, apparently Bean remembered it, too, for his voice came over the headset, saying, "Remember, the enemy's gate is down .”

Molo, Soup, Vlad, Dumper, and Crazy Tom all laughed. They remembered, too.

And Ender also laughed. It was funny. The adults taking all this so seriously, and the children playing along, playing along, believing it too until suddenly the adults went too far, tried too hard, and the children could see through their game. Forget it, Mazer. I don't care if I pass your test, I don't care if I follow your rules, if you can cheat, so can I. I won't let you beat me unfairly -- I'll beat you unfairly first.

In that final battle in Battle School, he had won by ignoring the enemy, ignoring his own losses; he had moved against the enemy's gate.

And the enemy's gate was down.

If I break this rule, they'll never let me be a commander. It would be too dangerous. I'll never have to play a game again. And that is victory.

He whispered quickly into the microphone. His commanders took their parts of the fleet and grouped themselves into a thick projectile, a cylinder aimed at the nearest of the enemy formations. The enemy, far from trying to repel him, welcomed him in, so he could be thoroughly entrapped before they destroyed him. Mazer is at least taking into account the fact that by now they would have learned to respect me, thought Ender. And that does buy me time.

Ender dodged downward, north, east, and down again, not seeming to follow any plan, but always ending up a little closer to the enemy planet. Finally the enemy began to close in on him too tightly. Then, suddenly, Ender's formation burst. His fleet seemed to melt into chaos. The eighty fighters seemed to follow no plan at all, firing at enemy ships at random, working their way into hopeless individual paths among the bugger craft.

After a few minutes of battle, however, Ender whispered to his squadron leaders once more, and suddenly a dozen of the remaining fighters formed again into a formation. But now they were on the far side of one of the enemy's most formidable groups; they had, with terrible losses, passed through and now they had covered more than half the distance to the enemy's planet.

The enemy sees now, thought Ender. Surely Mazer sees what I'm doing.

Or perhaps Mazer cannot believe that I would do it. Well so much the better for me.

Ender's tiny fleet darted this way and that, sending two or three fighters out as if to attack, then bringing them back. The enemy closed in, drawing in ships and formations that had been widely scattered, bringing them in for the kill. The enemy was most concentrated beyond Ender, so he could not escape back into open space, closing him in. Excellent, thought Ender. Closer. Come closer.

Then he whispered a command and the ships dropped like rocks toward the planet's surface. They were starships and fighters, completely unequipped to handle the heat of passage through an atmosphere. But Ender never intended them to reach the atmosphere. Almost from the moment they began to drop, they were focusing their Little Doctors on one

thing only. The planet itself.

One, two, four, seven of his fighters were blown away. It was all a gamble now, whether any of his ships would survive long enough to get in range. It would not take long, once they could focus on the planet's surface. Just a moment with Dr, Device, that's all I want. It occurred to Ender that perhaps the computer wasn't even equipped to show what would happen to a planet if the Little Doctor attacked it. What will I do then, shout Bang, you're dead?

Ender took his hands off the controls and leaned in to watch what happened. The perspective was close to the enemy planet now, as the ship hurtled into its well of gravity. Surely it's in range now, thought Ender. It must be in range and the computer can't handle it.

Then the surface of the planet, which filled half the simulator field now, began to bubble; there was a gout of explosion, hurling debris out toward Ender's fighters. Ender tried to imagine what was happening inside the planet. The field growing and growing, the molecules bursting apart but finding nowhere for the separate atoms to go.

Within three seconds the entire planet burst apart, becoming a sphere of bright dust, hurtling outward. Ender's fighters were among the first to go: their perspective suddenly vanished, and now the simulator could only display the perspective of the starships waiting beyond the edges of the battle. It was as close as Ender wanted to be. The sphere of the exploding planet grew outward faster than the enemy ships could avoid it. And it carried with it the Little Doctor, not so little anymore, the field taking apart every ship in its path, erupting each one into a dot of light before it went on.

Only at the very periphery of the simulator did the M.D. field weaken. Two or three enemy ships were drifting away. Ender's own starships did not explode. But where the vast enemy fleet had been, and the planet they protected, there was nothing meaningful. A lump of dirt was growing as gravity drew much of the debris downward again. It was glowing hot and spinning visibly; it was also much smaller than the world had been before. Much of its mass was now a cloud still flowing outward.

Ender took off his headphones, filled with the cheers of his squadron leaders, and only then realized that there was just as much noise in the room with him. Men in uniform were hugging each other, laughing, shouting; others were weeping; some knelt or lay prostrate, and Ender knew they

were caught up in prayer. Ender didn't understand. It seemed all wrong. They were supposed to be angry.

Colonel Graff detached himself from the others and came to Ender. Tears streamed down his face, but he was smiling. He bent over, reached out his arms, and to Ender's surprise he embraced him, held him tightly, and whispered, "Thank you, thank you Ender. Thank God for you, Ender."

The others soon came, too, shaking his hand, congratulating him. He tried to make sense of this. Had he passed the test after all? It was his victory, not theirs, and a hollow one at that, a cheat; why did they act as if he had won with honor?

The crowd parted and Mazer Rackham walked through. He came straight to Ender and held out his hand.

"You made the hard choice, boy. All or nothing. End them or end us. But heaven knows there was no other way you could have done it. Congratulations. You beat them, and it's all over."

All over. Beat them. Ender didn't understand. "I beat you ."

Mazer laughed, a loud laugh that filled the room.

"Ender, you never played me . You never played a game since I became your enemy."

Ender didn't get the joke. He had played a great many games, at a terrible cost to himself. He began to get angry.

Mazer reached out and touched his shoulder. Ender shrugged him off. Mazer then grew serious and said, "Ender, for the past few months you have been the battle commander of our fleets. This was the Third Invasion. There were no games, the battles were real, and the only enemy you fought was the buggers. You won every battle, and today you finally fought them at their home world, where the queen was, all the queens from all their colonies, they all were there and you destroyed them completely. They'll never attack us again. You did it. You."

Real. Not a game. Ender's mind was too tired to cope with it all. They weren't just points of light in the air, they were real ships that he had fought with and real ships he had destroyed. And a real world that he had blasted into oblivion. He walked through the crowd, dodging their congratulations, ignoring their hands, their words, their rejoicing. When he got to his own room he stripped off his clothes, climbed into bed, and slept.

Ender awoke when they shook him. It took a moment to recognize them. Graff and Rackham. He turned his back on them. Let me sleep.

“Ender, we need to talk to you,” said Graff. Ender rolled back to face them.

"They've been playing out the videos on Earth all day, all night since the battle yesterday.”

“Yesterday?” He had slept through until the next day.

"You're a hero. Ender. They've seen what you did. You and the others. I don't think there's a government on Earth that hasn't voted you their highest medal.”

“I killed them all, didn't I?” Ender asked.

“All who?” asked Graff. "The buggers? That was the idea.”

Mazer leaned in close. "That's what the war was for.”

"All their queens. So I killed all their children, all of everything.”

"They decided that when they attacked us. It wasn't your fault. It's what had to happen.”

Ender grabbed Mazer's uniform and hung onto it, pulling him down so they were face to face. “I didn't want to kill them all. I didn't want to kill anybody! I'm not a killer! You didn't want me, you bastards, you wanted Peter, but you made me do it, you tricked me into it!” He was crying. He was out of control.

“Of course we tricked you into it. That's the whole point,” said Graff. "It had to be a trick or you couldn't have done it. It's the bind we were in. We had to have a commander with so much empathy that he would think like the buggers, understand them and anticipate them. So much compassion that he could win the love of his underlings and work with them like a perfect machine, as perfect as the buggers. But somebody with that much compassion could never be the killer we needed. Could never go into battle willing to win at all costs. If you knew, you couldn't do it. If you were the kind of person who would do it even if you knew, you could never have understood the buggers well enough.”

“And it had to be a child, Ender,” said Mazer. "You were faster than me. Better than me. I was too old and cautious. Any decent person who knows what warfare is can never go into battle with a whole heart. But you didn't know. We

made sure you didn't know. You were reckless and brilliant and young. It's what you were born for."

"We had pilots with our ships, didn't we."

"Yes."

"I was ordering pilots to go in and die and I didn't even know it."

"They knew it, Ender, and they went anyway. They knew what it was for."

"You never asked me! You never told me the truth about anything!"

"You had to be a weapon, Ender. Like a gun, like the Little Doctor, functioning perfectly but not knowing what you were aimed at. We aimed you. We're responsible. If there was something wrong, we did it."

"Tell me later," Ender said. His eyes closed.

Mazer Rackham shook him. "Don't go to sleep, Ender," he said. "It's very important."

"You're finished with me," Ender said. "Now leave me alone."

"That's why we're here." Mazer said, "We're trying to tell you. They're not through with you, not at all, it's crazy down there. They're going to start a war, Americans claiming the Warsaw Pact is about to attack, and the Pact saying the same thing about the Hegemon. The bugger war isn't twenty-four hours dead and the world down there is back to fighting again, as bad as ever. And all of them are worried about you. And all of them want you. The greatest military leader in history, they want you to lead their armies. The Americans. The Hegemon. Everybody but the Warsaw Pact, and they want you dead."

"Fine with me," said Ender.

"We have to take you away from here. There are Russian marines all over Eros, and the Polemarch is Russian. It could turn to bloodshed at any time."

Ender turned his back on them again. This time they let him. He did not sleep, though. He listened to them.

"I was afraid of this, Rackham. You pushed him too hard. Some of those lesser outposts could have waited until after. You could have given him some days to rest."

"Are you doing it, too, Graff? Trying to decide how I could have done it better? You don't know what would have happened if I hadn't pushed. Nobody knows. I did it the way I did it, and it worked. Above all, it worked. Memorize that defense, Graff. You may have to use it, too."

"Sorry."

"I can see what it's done to him. Colonel Liki says there's a good chance he'll be permanently damaged, but I don't believe it. He's too strong. Winning meant a lot to him, and he won."

"Don't tell me about strong. The kid's eleven. Give him some rest, Rackham. Things haven't exploded yet. We can post a guard outside his door."

"Or post a guard outside another door and pretend that it's his."

"Whatever."

They went away. Ender slept again.

Time passed without touching Ender, except with glancing blows. Once he awoke for a few minutes with something pressing his hand, pushing downward on it, with a dull, insistent pain. He reached over and touched it; it was a needle passing into a vein. He tried to pull it out, but it was taped on and he was too weak. Another time he awoke in darkness to hear people near him murmuring and cursing. His ears were ringing with the loud noise that had awakened him; he did not remember the noise. "Get the lights on," someone said. And another time he thought he heard someone crying softly near him.

It might have been a single day; it might have been a week; from his dreams, it could have been months. He seemed to pass through lifetimes in his dreams. Through the Giant's Drink again, past the wolf-children, reliving the terrible deaths, the constant murders; he heard a voice whispering in the forest, You had to kill the children to get to the End of the World. And he tried to answer. I never wanted to kill anybody. Nobody ever asked me if I wanted to kill anybody. But the forest laughed at him. And when he leapt from the cliff at the End of the World, sometimes it was not clouds that caught him, but a fighter that carried him to a vantage point near the surface of the buggers' world, so he could watch, over and over, the eruption of death when Dr. Device set off a reaction on the planet's face; then closer and closer, until he could watch individual buggers explode, turn to light, then collapse into a pile of dirt before his eyes. And the queen, surrounded by infants; only the queen was Mother, and the infants were Valentine and all the children

he had known in Battle School. One of them had Bonzo's face, and he lay there bleeding through the eyes and nose, saying, You have no honor. And always the dream ended with a mirror or a pool of water or the metal surface of ship, something that would reflect his face back to him.

At first it was always Peter's face, with blood and a snake's tail coming from the mouth. After a while, though, it began to be his own face, old and sad, with eyes that grieved for a billion, billion murders -- but they were his own eyes, and he was content to wear them.

That was the world Ender lived in for many lifetimes during the five days of the League War.

When he awoke again he was lying in darkness. In the distance he could hear the thump, thump of explosions. He listened for a while. Then he heard a soft footstep.

He turned over and flung out a hand, to grasp whoever was sneaking up on him. Sure enough, he caught someone's clothing and pulled him down toward his knees, ready to kill him if need be.

"Ender, it's me, it's me!"

He knew the voice. It came out of his memory as if it were a million years ago.

"Alai."

"Salaam, pinprick. What were you trying to do, kill me?"

"Yes. I thought you were trying to kill me ."

"I was trying not to wake you up. Well, at least you have some survival instinct left. The way Mazer talks about it, you were becoming a vegetable."

"I was trying to. What's the thumping."

"There's a war going on here. Our section is blacked out to keep us safe."

Ender swung his legs out to sit up. He couldn't do it, though. His head hurt too bad. He winced in pain."

"Don't sit up, Ender. It's all right. It looks like we might win it. Not all the Warsaw Pact people went with the Polemarch. A lot of them came over when the Strategos told them you were loyal to the I.F."

"I was asleep."

"So he lied. You weren't plotting treason in your dreams, were you? Some of the Russians who came in told us that when the Polemarch ordered them to find you and kill you, they almost killed him. Whatever they may feel about other people, Ender, they love you. The whole world watched our battles. Videos, day and night. I've seen some. Complete with

your voice giving the orders. It's all there, nothing censored. Good stuff. You've got a career in the vids."

"I don't think so," said Ender.

"I was joking. Hey, can you believe it? We won the war. We were so eager to grow up so we could fight in it, and it was us all the time. I mean, we're kids. Ender. And it was us." Alai laughed. "It was you, anyway. You were good, bosh. I didn't know how you'd get us out of that last one. But you did. You were good."

Ender noticed the way he spoke in the past good. "What am I now, Alai?"

"Still good."

"At what?"

"At -- anything. There's a million soldiers who'd follow you to the end of the universe."

"I don't want to go to the end of the universe."

"So where do you want to go? They'll follow you."

I want to go home, thought Ender, but I don't know where it is.

The thumping went silent.

"Listen to that," said Alai.

They listened. The door opened. Someone stood there. Someone small. "It's over," he said. It was Bean. As if to prove it, the lights went on.

"Ho, Bean," Ender said.

"Ho, Ender."

Petra followed him in, with Dink holding her hand. They came to Ender's bed. "Hey, the hero's awake," said Dink.

"Who won?" asked Ender.

"We did, Ender," said Bean. "You were there."

"He's not that crazy, Bean. He meant who won just now." Petra took Ender's hand. "There was a truce on Earth. They've been negotiating for days. They finally agreed to accept the Locke Proposal."

"He doesn't know about the Locke Proposal--"

"It's very complicated, but what it means here is that the I.F. will stay in existence, but without the Warsaw Pact in it. So the Warsaw Pact marines are going home. I think Russia agreed to it because they're having a revolt of the Slavic helots. Everybody's got troubles. About five hundred died here, but it was worse on Earth."

"The Hegemon resigned," said Dink. "It's crazy down there. Who cares."

"You OK?" Petra asked him, touching his head. "You

scared us. They said you were crazy, and we said they were crazy."

"I'm crazy," said Ender. "But I think I'm OK."

"When did you decide that?" asked Alai.

"When I thought you were about to kill me, and I decided to kill you first. I guess I'm just a killer to the core. But I'd rather be alive than dead."

They laughed and agreed with him. Then Ender began to cry and embraced Bean and Petra, who were closest. "I missed you," he said. "I wanted to see you so bad."

"You saw us pretty bad," Petra answered. She kissed his cheek.

"I saw you magnificent," said Ender. "The ones I needed most, I used up soonest. Bad planning on my part."

"Everybody's OK now," said Dink. "Nothing was wrong with any of us that five days of cowering in blacked-out rooms in the middle of a war couldn't cure."

"I don't have to be your commander anymore, do I?" asked Ender. "I don't want to command anybody again."

"You don't have to command anybody," said Dink, "but you're always our commander."

Then they were silent for a while.

"So what do we do now?" asked Alai. "The bugger war's over, and so's the war down there on Earth, and even the war here. What do we do now?"

"We're kids," said Petra. "They'll probably make us go to school. It's a law. You have to go to school till you're seventeen."

They all laughed at that. Laughed until tears streamed down their faces.

Ender's Game

15

Speaker for the Dead

The lake was still; there was no breeze. The two men sat together in chairs on the floating dock. A small wooden raft was tied up at the dock; Graff hooked his foot in the rope and pulled the raft in, then let it drift out, then pulled it in again.

"You've lost weight."

"One kind of stress puts it on, another takes it off. I'm a creature of chemicals."

"It must have been hard."

Graff shrugged. "Not really. I knew I'd be acquitted."

"Some of us weren't so sure. People were crazy for a while there. Mistreatment of children, negligent homicide -- those videos of Bonzo's and Stilson's deaths were pretty gruesome. To watch one child do that to another."

"As much as anything, I think the videos saved me. The prosecution edited them, but we showed the whole thing. It was plain that Ender was not the provocateur. After that, it was just a second-guessing game. I said I did what I believed was necessary for the preservation of the human race, and it worked; we got the judges to agree that the prosecution had to prove beyond doubt that Ender would have won the war without the training we gave him. After that, it was simple. The exigencies of war."

"Anyway, Graff, it was a great relief to us. I know we quarreled, and I know the prosecution used tapes of our conversations against you. But by then I knew that you were right, and I offered to testify for you."

"I know, Anderson. My lawyers told me."

"So what will you do now?"

"I don't know. Still relaxing. I have a few years of leave accrued. Enough to take me to retirement, and I have plenty of salary that I never used, sitting around in banks. I could live on the interest. Maybe I'll do nothing."

"It sounds nice. But I couldn't stand it. I've been offered the presidency of three different universities, on the theory

that I'm an educator. They don't believe me when I say that all I ever cared about at the Battle School was the game. I think I'll go with the other offer."

"Commissioner?"

"Now that the wars are over, it's time to play games again. It'll be almost like vacation, anyway. Only twenty-eight teams in the league. Though after years of watching those children flying, football is like watching slugs bash into each other."

They laughed. Graff sighed and pushed the raft with his foot.

"That raft. Surely you can't float on it."

Graff shook his head. "Ender built it."

"That's right. This is where you took him."

"It's even been deeded over to him. I saw to it that he was amply rewarded. He'll have all the money he ever needs."

"If they ever let him come back to use it."

"They never will."

"With Demosthenes agitating for him to come home?"

"Demosthenes isn't on the nets anymore."

Anderson raised an eyebrow. "What does that mean?"

"Demosthenes has retired. Permanently."

"You know something, you old farteater. You know who Demosthenes is."

"Was."

"Well, tell me!"

"No."

"You're no fun anymore, Graff."

"I never was."

"At least you can tell me why. There were a lot of us who thought Demosthenes would be Hegemon someday."

"There was never a chance of that. No, even Demosthenes' mob of political cretins couldn't persuade the Hegemon to bring Ender back to Earth. Ender is far too dangerous."

"He's only eleven. Twelve, now."

"All the more dangerous because he could so easily be controlled. In all the world, the name of Ender is one to conjure with. The child-god, the miracle worker, with life and death in his hands. Every petty tyrant-to-be would like to have the boy, to set him in front of an army and watch the world either flock to join or cower in fear. If Ender came to Earth, he'd want to come here, to rest, to salvage what he can

of his childhood. But they'd never let him rest."

"I see. Someone explained that to Demosthenes?"

Graff smiled. "Demosthenes explained it to someone else. Someone who could have used Ender as no one else could have, to rule the world and make the world like it."

"Who?"

"Locke."

"Locke is the one who argued for Ender to stay on Eros."

"All is not always as it seems."

"It's too deep for me, Graff. Give me the game. Nice, neat rules. Referees. Beginnings and endings. Winners and losers and then everybody goes home to their wives."

"Get me tickets to some games now and then, all right?"

"You won't really stay here and retire, will you?"

"No."

"You're going into the Hegemony, aren't you?"

"I'm the new Minister of Colonization."

"So they're doing it."

"As soon as we get the reports back on the bugger colony worlds. I mean, there they are, already fertile, with housing and industry in place, and all the buggers dead. Very convenient. We'll repeal the population limitation laws--"

"Which everybody hates--"

"And all those thirds and fourths and fifths get on starships and head out for worlds known and unknown."

"Will people really go?"

"People always go. Always. They always believe they can make a better life than in the old world."

"What the hell, maybe they can."

At first Ender believed that they would bring him back to Earth as soon as things quieted down. But things were quiet now, had been quiet for a year, and it was plain to him now that they would not bring him back at all, that he was much more useful as a name and a story than he would ever be as an inconvenient flesh-and-blood person.

And there was the matter of the court martial on the crimes of Colonel Graff. Admiral Chamrajnagar tried to keep Ender from watching it, but failed -- Ender had been awarded the rank of admiral, too, and this was one of the few times he asserted the privileges the rank implied. So he watched the videos of the fights with Stilson and Bonzo, watched as the

photographs of the corpses were displayed, listened as the psychologists and lawyers argued whether murder had been committed or the killing was in self-defense. Ender had his own opinion, but no one asked him, Throughout the trial, it was really Ender himself under attack. The prosecution was too clever to charge him directly, but there were attempts to make him look sick, perverted, criminally insane.

“Never mind,” said Mazer Rackham. "The politicians are afraid of you, but they can't destroy your reputation yet. That won't be done until the historians get at you in thirty years.”

Ender didn't care about his reputation. He watched the videos impassively, but in fact he was amused. In battle I killed ten billion buggers, who were as alive and wise as any man, who had not even launched a third attack against us, and no one thinks to call it a crime.

All his crimes weighed heavy on him, the deaths of Stilson and Bonzo no heavier and no lighter than the rest.

And so, with that burden, he waited through the empty months until the world that he had saved decided he could come home.

One by one, his friends reluctantly left him, called home to their families, to be received with heroes' welcomes in their towns. Ender watched the videos of their homecomings, and was touched when they' spent much of their time praising Ender Wiggin, who taught them everything, they said, who taught them and led them into victory. But if they called for him to be brought home, the words were censored from the videos and no one heard the plea.

For a time, the only work in Eros was cleaning up after the bloody League War and receiving the reports of the starships, once warships, that were now exploring the bugger colony worlds.

But now Eros was busier than ever, more crowded than it had ever been during the war, as colonists were brought here to prepare for their voyages to the empty bugger worlds. Ender took part in the work, as much as they would let him, but it did not occur to them that this twelve-year-old boy might be as gifted at peace as he was at war. But he was patient with their tendency to ignore him, and learned to make his proposals and suggest his plans through the few adults who listened to him, and let them present them as their own. He was concerned, not about getting credit, but about getting the job done.

The one thing he could not bear was the worship of the

colonists. He learned to avoid the tunnels where they lived, because they would always recognize him -- the world had memorized his face -- and the they would scream and shout and embrace him and congratulate him and show him the children they had named after him and tell him how he was so young it broke their hearts and they didn't blame him for any of his murders because it wasn't his fault he was just a child --

He hid from them as best he could.

There was one colonist, though, he couldn't hide from.

He wasn't inside Eros that day. He had gone up with the shuttle to the new ISL, where he had been learning to do surface work on the starships; it was unbecoming to an officer to do mechanical labor, Chamrajnagar told him, but Ender answered that since the trade he had mastered wasn't much called for now, it was about time he learned another skill.

They spoke to him through his helmet radio and told him that someone was waiting to see him as soon as he could come in. Ender couldn't think of anyone he wanted to see, and so he didn't hurry. He finished installing the shield for the ship's ansible and then hooked his way across the face of the ship and pulled himself up into the airlock.

She was waiting for him outside the changing room. For a moment he was annoyed that they would let a colonist come to bother him here, where he came to be alone; then he looked again, and realized that if the young woman were a little girl, he would know her.

“Valentine,” he said.

"Hi, Ender.”

"What are you doing here?”

"Demosthenes retired. Now I'm going with the first colony.”

"It's fifty years to get there--”

"Only two years if you're aboard the ship.”

"But if you ever came back, everybody you knew on Earth would be dead--”

"That was what I had in mind. I was hoping, though, that someone I knew on Eros might come with me.

"I don't want to go to a world we stole from the buggers. I just want to go home.”

"Ender, you're never going back to Earth. I saw to that before I left.”

He looked at her in silence.

"I tell you that now, so that if you want to hate me, you can hate me from the beginning."

They went to Ender's tiny compartment in the ISL and she explained. Peter wanted Ender back on Earth, under the protection of the Hegemon's Council. "The way things are right now, Ender, that would put you effectively under Peter's control, since half the council now does just what Peter wants. The ones that aren't Locke's lapdogs are under his thumb in other ways."

"Do they know who he really is?"

"Yes. He isn't publicly known,. but people in high places know him. It doesn't matter any more. He has too much power for them to worry about his age. He's done incredible things, Ender."

"I noticed the treaty a year ago was named for Locke."

"That was his breakthrough. He proposed it through his friends from the public policy nets, and then Demosthenes got behind it, too. It was the moment he had been waiting for, to use Demosthenes' influence with the mob and Locke's influence with the intelligentsia to accomplish something noteworthy. It forestalled a really vicious war that could have lasted for decades."

"He decided to be a statesman?"

"I think so. But in his cynical moments, of which there are many, he pointed out to me that if he had allowed the League to fall apart completely, he'd have to conquer the world piece by piece. As long as the Hegemony exists, he can do it in one lump."

Ender nodded. "That's the Peter that I knew."

"Funny, isn't it? That Peter would save millions of lives."

"While I killed billions."

"I wasn't going to say that."

"So he wanted to use me?"

"He had plans for you, Ender. He would publicly reveal himself when you arrived, going to meet you in front of all the videos. Ender Wiggin's older brother, who also happened to be the great Locke, the architect of peace. Standing next to you, he would look quite mature. And the physical resemblance between you is stronger than ever. It would be quite simple for him, then, to take over."

"Why did you stop him?"

"Ender, you wouldn't be happy spending the rest of your life as Peter's pawn."

"Why not? I've spent my life as someone's pawn."

"Me too. I showed Peter all the evidence that I had assembled, enough to prove in the eyes of the public that he was a psychotic killer. It included full-color pictures of tortured squirrels and some of the monitor videos of the way he treated you. It took some work to get it all together, but by the time he saw it, he was willing to give me what I wanted. What I wanted was your freedom and mine."

"It's not my idea of freedom to go live in the house of the people that I killed."

"Ender, what's done is done. Their worlds are empty now, and ours is full. And we can take with us what their worlds have never known -- cities full of people who live private, individual lives, who love and hate each other for their own reasons. In all the bugger worlds, there was never more than a single story to be told; when we're there, the world will be full of stories, and we'll improvise their endings day by day. Ender, Earth belongs to Peter. And if you don't go with me now, he'll have you there, and use you up until you wish you'd never been born. Now is the only chance you'll get to get away."

Ender said nothing.

"I know what you're thinking, Ender. You're thinking that I'm trying to control you just as much as Peter or Graff or any of the others."

"It crossed my mind."

"Welcome to the human race. Nobody controls his own life, Ender. The best you can do is choose to be controlled by good people, by people who love you. I didn't come here because I wanted to be a colonist. I came because I've spent my whole life in the company of the brother that I hated. Now I want a chance to know the brother that I loved, before it's too late, before we're not children anymore."

"It's already too late for that."

"You're wrong, Ender. You think you're grown up and tired and jaded with everything, but in your heart you're just as much a kid as I am. We can keep it secret from everybody else. While you're governing the colony and I'm writing political philosophy, they'll never guess that in the darkness of night we sneak into each other's room and play checkers and have pillowfights."

Ender laughed, but he had noticed some things she dropped too casually for them to be accidental. "Governing?"

"I'm Demosthenes, Ender, I went out with a bang. A public announcement that I believed so much in the

colonization movement that I was going in the first ship myself. At the same time, the Minister of Colonization, a former colonel named Graff, announced that the pilot of the colony ship would be the great Mazer Rackham, and the governor of the colony would be Ender Wiggin."

"They might have asked me."

"I wanted to ask you myself."

"But it's already announced."

"No. They'll be announcing it tomorrow, if you accept. Mazer accepted a few hours ago, back in Eros."

"You're telling everyone that you're Demosthenes? A fourteen-year-old girl?"

"We're only telling them that Demosthenes is going with the colony. Let them spend the next fifty years poring over the passenger list, trying to figure out which one of them is the great demagogue of the Age of Locke."

Ender laughed and shook his head. "You're actually having fun, Val."

"I can't think why I shouldn't."

"All right," said Ender. "I'll go. Maybe even as governor, as long as you and Mazer are there to help me. My abilities are a little underused at present."

She squealed and hugged him, for all the world like a typical teenage girl who just got the present that she wanted from her little brother.

"Val," he said, "I just want one thing clear. I'm not going for you. I'm not going in order to be governor, or because I'm bored here. I'm going because I know the buggers better than any other living soul, and maybe if I go there I can understand them better. I stole their future from them; I can only begin to repay by seeing what I can learn from their past."

The voyage was long. By the end of it, Val had finished the first volume of her history of the bugger wars and transmitted it by ansible, under Demosthenes' name, back to Earth, and Ender had won something better than the adulation of the passengers. They knew him now, and he had won their love and their respect.

He worked hard on the new world, governing by persuasion rather than fiat, and working as hard as anyone at the tasks involved in setting up a self-sustaining economy.

But his most important work, as everyone agreed, was exploring what the buggers had left behind, trying to find among structures, machinery, and fields long untended some things that human beings could use, could learn from. There were no books to read -- the buggers never needed them. With all things present in their memories, all things spoken as they were thought, when the buggers died their knowledge died with them.

And yet. From the sturdiness of the roofs that covered their animal sheds and their food supplies, Ender learned that winter would be hard, with heavy snows. From fences with sharpened stakes that pointed outward he learned that there were marauding animals that were a danger to the crops or the herds. From the mill he learned that the long, foul-tasting fruits that grew in the overgrown orchards were dried and ground into meal. And from the slings that once were used to carry infants along with adults into the fields, he learned that even though the buggers were not much for individuality, they did love their children.

Life settled down, and years passed. The colony lived in wooden houses and used the tunnels of the bugger city for storage and manufactories. They were governed by a council now, and administrators were elected, so that Ender, though they still called him governor, was in fact only a judge. There were crimes and quarrels alongside kindness and cooperation; there were people who loved each other and people who did not; it was a human world. They did not wait so eagerly for each new transmission from the ansible; the names that were famous on Earth meant little to them now. The only name they knew was that of Peter Wiggin, the Hegemon of Earth; the only news that came was news of peace, of prosperity, of great ships leaving the littoral of Earth's solar system, passing the comet shield and filling up the bugger worlds. Soon there would be other colonies on this world, Ender's World; soon there would be neighbors; already they were halfway here; but no one cared. They would help the newcomers when they came, teach them what they had learned, but what mattered in life now was who would marry whom, and who was sick, and when was planting time, and why should I pay him when the calf died three weeks after I got it.

“They've become people of the land,” said Valentine. "No one cares now that Demosthenes is sending the seventh volume of his history today. No one here will read it.”

Ender pressed a button and his desk showed him the next page. "Very insightful, Valentine. How many more volumes until you're through?"

"Just one. The story of Ender Wiggin."

"What will you do, wait to write it until I'm dead?"

"No. Just write it, and when I've brought it up to the present day, I'll stop."

"I have a better idea. Take it up to the day we won the final battle. Stop it there. Nothing that I've done since then is worth writing down."

"Maybe," said Valentine. "And maybe not."

The ansible had brought them word that the new colony ship was only a year away. They asked Ender to find a place for them to settle in, near enough to Ender's colony that the two colonies could trade, but far enough apart that they could be governed separately. Ender used the helicopter and began to explore. He took one of the children along, an eleven-year-old boy named Abra; he had been only three when the colony was founded, and he remembered no other world than this. He and Ender flew as far as the copter would carry them, then camped for the night and got a feel for the land on foot the next morning.

It was on the third morning that Ender suddenly began to feel an uneasy sense that he had been in this place before. He looked around; it was new land, he had never seen it. He called out to Abra.

"Ho, Ender!" Abra called. He was on top of a steep low hill. "Come up!"

Ender scrambled up, the turves coming away from his feet in the soft ground. Abra was pointing downward.

"Can you believe this?" he asked.

The hill was hollow. A deep depression in the middle, partially filled with water, was ringed by concave slopes that cantilevered dangerously over the water. In one direction the hill gave way to two long ridges that made a V-shaped valley: in the other direction the rose to a piece of white rock, grinning like a skull with a tree growing out of its mouth.

"It's like a giant died here," said Abra, "and the Earth grew up to cover his carcass,"

Now Ender knew why it had looked familiar. The Giant's corpse. He had played here too many times as a child not to

know this place. But it was not possible. The computer in the Battle School could not possibly have seen this place. He looked through his binoculars in a direction he knew well, fearing and hoping that he would see what belonged in that place.

Swings and slides. Monkey bars. Now overgrown, but the shapes still unmistakable.

“Somebody had to have built this,” Abra said, "Look, this skull place, it's not rock, look at it. This is concrete.”

“I know,” said Ender. "They built it for me.”

"What?”

"I know this place, Abra. The buggers built it for me.”

"The buggers were all dead fifty years before we got here.”

"You're right, it's impossible, but I know what I know. Abra, I shouldn't take you with me. It might be dangerous. If they knew me well enough to build this place, they might be planning to--”

"To get even with you.”

"For killing them.”

"So don't go, Ender. Don't do what they want you to do.”

"lf they want to get revenge, Abra, I don't mind. But perhaps they don't. Perhaps this is the closest they could come to talking. To writing me a note.”

"They didn't know how to read and write.”

"Maybe they were learning when they died.”

"Well, I'm sure as hell not sticking around here if you're taking off somewhere. I'm going with you.”

"No. You're too young to take the risk of--”

"Come on! You're Ender Wiggin. Don't tell me what eleven-year-old kids can do!”

Together they flew in the copter, over the playground, over the woods, over the well in the forest clearing. Then out to where there was, indeed, a cliff, with a cave in the cliff wall and a ledge right where the End of the World should be. And there in the distance, just where it should be in the fantasy game, was the castle tower.

He left Abra with the copter. "Don't come after me, and go home in an hour if I don't come back.”

"Eat it, Ender, I'm coming with you.”

"Eat it yourself, Abra, or I'll stuff you with mud.”

Abra could tell, despite Ender's joking tone, that he meant it, and so he stayed.

The walls of the tower were notched and ledged for easy

climbing. They meant him to get in.

The room was as it had always been. Ender remembered well enough to look for a snake on the floor, but there was only a rug with a carved snake's head at one corner. Imitation, not duplication; for a people who made no art, they had done well. They must have dragged these images from Ender's own mind, finding him and learning his darkest dreams across the lightyears. But why? To bring him to this room, of course. To leave a message for him. But where was the message, and how would he understand it?

The mirror was waiting for him on the wall. It was a dull sheet of metal, in which the rough shape of a human face had been scratched. They tried to draw the image I should see in the picture.

And looking at the mirror he could remember breaking it, pulling it from the wall, and snakes leaping out of the hidden place, attacking him, biting him wherever their poisonous fangs could find purchase.

How well do they know me, wondered Ender. Well enough to know how often I have thought of death, to know that I am not afraid of it? Well enough to know that even if I feared death, it would not stop me from taking that mirror from the wall.

He walked to the mirror, lifted, pulled away. Nothing jumped from the space behind it. Instead, in a hollowed-out place, there was a white ball of silk with a few frayed strands sticking out here and there. An egg? No. The pupa of a queen bugger, already fertilized by the larval males, ready, out of her own body, to hatch a hundred thousand buggers, including a few queens and males. Ender could see the slug-like males clinging to the walls of a dark tunnel, and the large adults carrying the infant queen to the mating room; each male in turn penetrated the larval queen, shuddered in ecstasy, and died, dropping to the tunnel floor and shriveling. Then the new queen was laid before the old, a magnificent creature clad in soft and shimmering wings, which had long since lost the power of flight but still contained the power of majesty. The old queen kissed her to sleep with the gentle poison in her lips, then wrapped her in threads from her belly, and commanded her to become herself, to become a new city, a new world, to give birth to many queens and many worlds.

How do I know this, thought Ender. How can I see these things, like memories in my own mind.

As if in answer, he saw the first of all his battles with the bugger fleets. He had seen it before on the simulator; now he saw it as the hive-queen saw it, through many different eyes. The buggers formed their globe of ships, and then the terrible fighters came out of the darkness and the Little Doctor destroyed them in a blaze of light. He felt then what the hive-queen felt, watching through her workers' eyes as death came to them too quickly to avoid, but not too quickly to be anticipated. There was no memory of pain or fear, though. What the hive-queen felt was sadness, a sense of resignation. She had not thought these words as she saw the humans coming to kill, but it was in words that Ender understood her: They did not forgive us, she thought. We will surely die.

“How can you live again?” he asked.

The queen in her silken cocoon had no words to give back; but when he closed his eyes and tried to remember, instead of memory came new images. Putting the cocoon in a cool place, a dark place, but with water, so she wasn't dry; no, not just water, but water mixed with the sap of a certain tree, and kept tepid so that certain reactions could take place in the cocoon. Then time. Days and weeks, for the pupa inside to change. And then, when the cocoon had changed to a dusty brown color, Ender saw himself splitting open the cocoon, and helping the small and fragile queen emerge. He saw himself taking her by the forelimb and helping her walk from her birthwater to a nesting place, soft with dried leaves on sand. Then I am alive, came the thought in his mind. Then I am awake. Then I make my ten thousand children.

“No,” said Ender. "I can't.”

Anguish.

"Your children are the monsters of our nightmares now. If I awoke you, we would only kill you again.”

There flashed through his mind a dozen images of human beings being killed by buggers, but with the image came a grief so powerful he could not bear it, and he wept their tears for them.

"If you could make them feel as you can make me feel, then perhaps they could forgive you.”

Only me, he realized. They found me through the ansible, followed it and dwelt in my mind. In the agony of my tortured dreams they came to know me, even as I spent my days destroying them; they found my fear of them, and found also that I had no knowledge I was killing them. In the few weeks they had, they built this place for me, and the

Giant's corpse and the playground and the ledge at the End of the World, so I would find this place by the evidence of my eyes. I am the only one they know, and so they can only talk to me, and through me. We are like you; the thought pressed into his mind. We did not mean to murder, and when we understood, we never came again. We thought we were the only thinking beings in the universe, until we met you, but never did we dream that thought could arise from the lonely animals who cannot dream each other's dreams. How were we to know? We could live with you in peace. Believe us, believe us, believe us.

He reached into the cavity and took out the cocoon. It was astonishingly light, to hold all the hope and future of a great race within it.

“I'll carry you,” said Ender, "I'll go from world to world until I find a time and a place where you can come awake in safety. And I'll tell your story to my people, so that perhaps in time they can forgive you, too. The way that you've forgiven me.”

He wrapped the queen's cocoon in his jacket and carried her from the tower.

“What was in there?” asked Abra.

“The answer,” said Ender.

"To what?”

“My question.” And that was all he said of the matter; they searched for five more days and chose a site for the new colony far to the east and south of the tower.

Weeks later he came to Valentine and told her to read something he had written; she pulled the file he named from the ship's computer, and read it.

It was written as if the hive-queen spoke, telling all that they had meant to do, and all that they had done. Here are our failures, and here is our greatness; we did not mean to hurt you, and we forgive you for our death. From their earliest awareness to the great wars that swept across their home world, Ender told the story quickly, as if it were an ancient memory. When he came to the tale of the great mother, the queen of all, who first learned to keep and teach the new queen instead of killing her or driving her away, then he lingered, telling how many times she had finally to destroy the child of her body, the new self that was not herself, until she bore one who understood her quest for harmony. This was a new thing in the world, two queens that loved and helped each other instead of battling, and together

they were stronger than any other hive. They prospered; they had more daughters who joined them in peace; it was the beginning of wisdom.

If only we could have talked to you, the hive-queen said in Ender's words. But since it could not be, we ask only this: that you remember us, not as enemies, but as tragic sisters, changed into a foul shape by Fate or God or Evolution. If we had kissed, it would have been the miracle to make us human in each other's eyes. Instead we killed each other. But still we welcome you now as guestfriends. Come into our home, daughters of Earth; dwell in our tunnels, harvest our fields; what we cannot do, you are now our hands to do for us. Blossom, trees; ripen, fields; be warm for them, suns; be fertile for them, planets: they are our adopted daughters, and they have come home.

The book that Ender wrote was not long, but in it was all the good and all the evil that the hive-queen knew. And he signed it, not with his name, but with a title:

SPEAKER FOR THE DEAD

On Earth, the book was published quietly, and quietly it was passed from hand to hand, until it was hard to believe that anyone on Earth might not have read it.

Most who read it found it interesting -- some who read it refused to set it aside. They began to live by it as best they could, and when their loved ones died, a believer would arise beside the grave to be the Speaker for the Dead, and say what the dead one would have said, but with full candor, hiding no faults and pretending no virtues. Those who came to such services sometimes found them painful and disturbing, but there were many who decided that their life was worthwhile enough, despite their errors, that when they died a Speaker should tell the truth for them.

On Earth it remained a religion among many religions. But for those who traveled the great cave of space and lived their lives in the hive-queen's tunnels and harvested the hive-queen's fields, it was the only religion. There was no colony without its Speaker for the Dead.

No one knew and no one really wanted to know who was the original Speaker. Ender was not inclined to tell them.

When Valentine was twenty-five years old, she finished the last volume of her history of the bugger wars. She included at the end the complete text of Ender's little book,

but did not say that Ender wrote it.

By ansible she got an answer from the ancient Hegemon, Peter Wiggin, seventy-seven years old with a failing heart.

“I know who wrote it,” he said. "If he can speak for the buggers, surely he can speak for me.”

Back and forth across the ansible Ender and Peter spoke, with Peter pouring out the story of his days and years, his crimes and his kindnesses. And when he died, Ender wrote a second volume, again signed by the Speaker for the Dead. Together, his two books were called the Hive-Queen and the Hegemon, and they were holy writ.

“Come on,” he said to Valentine one day. "Let's fly away and live forever.”

“We can't,” she said. "There are miracles even relativity can't pull off, Ender.”

"We have to go. I'm almost happy here.”

"So, stay.”

"I've lived too long with pain. I won't know who I am without it.”

So they boarded a starship and went from world to world. Wherever they stopped, he was always Andrew Wiggin, itinerant speaker for the dead, and she was always Valentine, historian errant, writing down the stories of the living while Ender spoke the stories of the dead. And always Ender carried with him a dry white cocoon, looking for the world where the hive-queen could awaken and thrive in peace. He looked a long time.